University of Alberta

Colouring with Brown Crayons: Evaluating Religious Education Curriculum

by

Stacie Reck

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Lis Reck (1944-2007), whose quiet determination, unfailing support and hopes for my future have always led my educational endeavors.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation established a tool for pedagogical evaluation a tool of Christian Religious Education (CRE) curricula. The study focused specifically on CRE curricula used in a church context as opposed to school setting.

Existing literature within the discipline of CRE indicates that curricula evaluation has been largely overlooked. There is a lack of systematic pedagogical evaluation of church based curricula; consequently CRE material used in the church context often remains virtually unquestioned. This dissertation raises possible parameters for a methodology to evaluate curriculum recognizing the need to critically examine the pedagogical approaches that undergird existing CRE materials

To establish a tool, existing Christian Religious Education curricula evaluation documents were examined and used as guides. Educational theory and its influence on changes in multicultural education, anti-racism and post-colonial discourse contributed to the development of a tentative tool. This tool was assessed using a selected Christian Religious Education curriculum. Subsequent adaptations and adjustments led to the formation of a final tool for evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This dissertation marks both an end and a beginning on my personal and academic journey. Many people have walked beside me on the long road. I am grateful to each and every one who offered insights, suggestions and support.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER

1. **INTRODUCTION** 1
   - **The Question** 5
   - **Definitions** 7
     - Religious Education 7
     - Christian Religious Education 8
     - Conflation of Religious Education and Education 9
     - Curriculum 10
   - **Limitations and Delimitations** 11
   - **Significance of Study** 12

2. **LITERATURE REVIEW** 14
   - **Definitions** 14
     - Evaluation 14
     - Stakeholders 15
     - Assessment and Measurement 16
     - History of Curriculum Evaluation 17
     - Approaches to Evaluation 19
     - Limitations of Educational Evaluation 22
   - **Historical Approaches to Evaluation of Christian Religious Education Curricula** 24
   - **Trends in Educational Theory** 26
     - Multicultural Education 26
     - Multicultural Education and Religious Education 30
     - Anti-racism 32
     - Definition of Postcolonial 35
     - Postcolonial Discourse 36
     - Whiteness 39
     - Spirituality of Children 40
   - **Summary** 44

3. **METHODOLOGY** 46
   - **Establishing an Evaluation Tool** 49
   - **Analysis of Christian Religious Education Curricula Evaluation Documents**
     - Regular Baptist Press 56
     - Group Publishing 60
     - Gospel Light 63
     - David C. Cook Communications 65
   - **Analysis of Christian Religious Education Curricula Evaluation Guides Designed for Specific Contexts**

LiFE Curriculum....69
Evaluating Curriculum for Sensitivity to Culture....71
Analysis of Education Curricula Evaluation Documents....76
Tentative Tool....79

4. **BUILDING A TOOL FOR EVALUATING CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULA....80**
Section One: Goal of Education....81
Potential Questions....82
Draft of the Evaluation Instrument....85
Section Two: Knowledge....85
Potential Questions....86
Draft of the Evaluation Instrument....89
Section Three: Social Sciences....90
Potential Questions....91
Draft of the Evaluation Instrument....95
Section Four: Curriculum and Teaching....96
Potential Questions....96
Draft of the Evaluation Instrument....99
Section Five: Education as Political....100
Potential Questions....101
The Tentative Tool....102
Omitted Questions....104
Summary....105

5. **TESTING THE EVALUATION TOOL....106**
Curriculum....106
Procedure....108
Section One: Goal of Education....108
Examining the Curriculum....109
Discussion of Tool....113
Section Two: Knowledge....116
Examining the Curriculum....116
Discussion of Tool....122
Section Three: Social Sciences....124
Examining the Curriculum....125
Discussion of Tool....131
Section Four: Curriculum and Teaching....133
Examining the Curriculum....134
Discussion of Tool....141
Section Five: Education as Political....141
Examining the Curriculum....142
Discussion of Tool....148

6. **CONCLUSIONS....152**
Research Sub Questions....157

Tool for Evaluating Religious Education Curricula.....160

7. REFERENCES.....166

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	A Matrix for Analysis of the Classic Expression of Religious Education	53
Table 2	Regular Baptist Press-How to Evaluate Your Sunday School Curriculum	57
Table 3	Group Publishing-How Does Your Curriculum Rate?	61
Table 4	Gospel Light - Curriculum Evaluation	63
Table 5	David C. Cook – Pick the Right Curriculum for Your Students	66
Table 6	Analysis of LiFE Curriculum for White Cultural Bias	69
Table 7	Evaluating Curriculum for Sensitivity to Culture	72
Table 8	University of Alberta – Curriculum Evaluation – Faculty of Education	76

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Diagram of Methodology for Establishing an Evaluation Tool for Christian Religious Education.....50

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> In everyone's lives, there are too many stories to relate and too many to clarify. I find it difficult to determine which stories to tell. It is like searching through thousands of scattered beads, hoping to find the right colors and shapes to attempt to string them into a necklace. Many episodes in my life are bound to be left out in order to string the necklace for this chapter. The quote from Richard Attenborough's film Gandhi reflects how I feel: No one person's life [and research] can be encompassed in one telling. There is no way to give each year its allotted weight, to include each person who shaped a lifetime. What can be done is to be faithful in spirit to the record and try to find one's way to the heart of the person.[1] Mei Lian Yang Lam

Reflecting on my personal journey, I find my attention drawn to one pivotal "bead," one moment in time that began my passage into the area of Christian religious education curriculum. Although it hardly captures all of the details along the way, it clearly signifies a change in orientation, a paradigm shift that sparked an ongoing expedition leading to this research. The "bead" was a straightforward question posed by a five year old child – "What colour is Jesus?"

A number of years ago, I was working in an inner city Christian religious education program for children ages 5-12. This summer program was an interactive outdoor program designed to expose children to Christianity and to offer a fun and engaging experience. We finished playing a game and we sat down on the grass to listen to a Bible story. A five year old girl leaned over to me and casually asked; "What colour is Jesus?" I did not respond; thankfully another leader was able to offer a reasonable answer.

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[1] Mei Lian Yang Lam, "Scattered Beads: Reflections on My Teaching Career from the Periphery of Canadian Society" in *Making a Difference about Difference: The Lives and Careers of Racial Minority Immigrant Teachers*, ed. Dennis Theissen, Nina Bascia and Ivor Gooson (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1996), 51.

Although this was a simple question, it raised a variety of issues for me. I subsequently became increasingly interested in the way Christianity is presented in curriculum. What is included? What is left out? How are different people groups represented? Are issues such as race, class and gender addressed? Is our approach to curriculum consistent with our theological understanding?

Over the course of the following years, I worked full time as the director of an urban children's program and I wrote and designed curriculum for the program. In addition, I was involved in related supporting programs such as tutoring in a neighboring public school, a mentoring program, directing a breakfast program, food bank, clothing bank, Sunday school programs and summer camp programs. These exposed me to the many facets of this context, both positive and negative. Through networking with other religious educators and through my own personal experience, I have come to believe that no commercially available material is appropriate for use in all these diverse environments. To believe so would be to dishonor the individuality of humans and to minimize the influences of the contexts and environment in which humans live and learn. Others seem to agree; and, this lack of material has forced many program leaders to write their own lessons and activities, many of which seem, in my estimation, to be inadequate.

In this dissertation, I position myself as a "Christian religious educator,"thus allowing me to address these issues within my own community. My background in this community is extensive. My personal spiritual development began at home under the strong but quiet influence of my mother who had a deeply committed and abiding faith. I was later affected by and continue to be influenced by my sister's religious journey. However, it was not until I became an adult that I decided to follow the Christian

tradition myself. In these early years, one of the features that most attracted me to Christianity was its history of social justice that I witnessed enacted in my local community. Consequently, I spent over seven years working in an urban children's Christian religious education context developing curriculum.

Recognizing my own inability to deal with curriculum issues in an adequate manner, I decided to seek formal education. I enrolled at Acadia University and I decided to pursue a Master of Religious Education. Following this degree, I worked full time in Children's programming. At this point I struggled to write curriculum to attempt to meet some of the needs I encountered in an urban context. It quickly became apparent that many of the children struggled at school; they were well below grade level in literacy. In response, I began to participate in a tutoring program at the local elementary school and I began to attempt to adapt my Christian Religious Education curriculum to assist the students in strengthening their abilities in literacy.

I also struggled to articulate religious/theological concepts in a manner that was as accurate as possible but also within the reading and comprehension level of the children. Again feeling ill equipped, I needed to continue to research and I sought formal education, this time in theology. I began a Master of Arts in Theology so that I would be able to write curriculum and communicate theological concepts adequately. My journey in education and research eventually led me to the University of Alberta, Faculty of Education so that I could look specifically at education, curriculum and religious education.

I am currently Assistant Professor of Education in the Bachelor of Education program at Atlantic Baptist University (ABU). While this post-secondary school is

confessional in its roots, the Bachelor of Education program at ABU is designed to train teachers for the public school setting.

As a Christian religious educator, I passionately believe that we owe children more than a collection of activities that have been thrown together in haste due to a lack of premeditated and intelligently-designed curriculum or from the mistaken belief that all children can or should learn in homogenized ways. Both philosophies seem to thoughtlessly ignore the importance of both the children we are working with or the importance of the content we are teaching – and the importance of content is as true in both secular and sacred areas. Teaching, in the Christian community, is a vocation of trust. It seems no less important in any community. Our responsibility as teachers is to offer our students the very best that we have. These beliefs underscore my motivation for pedagogical research into the curricula of Christian religious education.

In post 9/11 North America, the societal impact of religious affiliation is commonly understood. There was a time "in the middle years of the twentieth century it was generally taken for granted that secularism was an irreversible trend and faith would never again play a part in world events."[2] Historical record has certainly proved otherwise. In fact "we are witnessing a deepening of adherence to religious identity at a time when the increased interactions among religious has made the need for tolerance and pluralism extraordinarily crucial."[3] Religious beliefs continue to play an important role in informing the worldview and actions of individuals. Most religious groups recognize that "an education that fails to equip children to address worldview questions in an

[2] Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2000), xi.
[3] Benjamin Barber, "Jihad vs McWorld," (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001): 20, as quoted in Farid Panjwani, "Agreed Syllabi and Un-Agreed Values: Religious Education and Missed Opportunities for Fostering Social Cohesion," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 53, no. 3 (September 2005), 377.

appropriate breadth and depth will simply end up imposing one or other prevailing worldview by default."[4] Christian religious education is a significant vehicle through which the Christian church transmits its core values and worldview to its followers. Because Christian religious education curricula directly impacts the believers' way of being in the world, it must be taken seriously and examined in a critical manner.

Historically, Christian religious education curricula have reflected a superficial approach to the diversity of Christian contexts. In an attempt to develop broad material that accommodated and celebrated difference, early curriculum writers frequently fell into a pedagogical approach that seemed to be a Eurocentric, sanitized version of multicultural inclusion which tended to address diversity through what educator Ratna Ghosh refers to as "the three "S" approach (saris, samosas, and steel bands) or the static museum approach (culture as artifact). This latter approach naively assumed that the issue of diversity could be addressed through knowing about or even learning to appreciate, each other's cultures".[5] In my own work with Christian religious education curricula, the cursory methodology and approach to curriculum development used in dealing with a diverse student population appeared to be all too common and became an approach, which I have come to refer to as "colouring with brown crayons."

The Question

With the reality of increasing immigration and globalization, educators must seek to develop curriculum that both resonates with learners and reflects the complexity of

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[4] Andrew Wright, "On The Intrinsic Value of Religious Education," *British Journal of Religious Education* 27, no. 1 (January 2005), 26.

[5] Ratna Ghosh, *Redefining Multicultural Education.* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace and Company Canada, Ltd., 1996), 44.

hybrid identities present in the global community. Consequently, Christian religious educators must begin to re-examine curriculum documents, recognizing what Ingrid Johnston articulates as the "need to look beyond simplistic responses to diversity toward an understanding of how complex questions of representation are intertwined with issues of culture, race, gender and ethnicity and with questions of subjectivity and identity."[6]

The purpose of this study was to develop an evaluation guide to help the North American Christian educational community come to examine Christian religious education curricula critically and in a manner that reflects the diversity of the Christian religious community and the needs of those for whom this community takes educational responsibility – the students we teach. This broad goal fits into a belief that curriculum can and should be improved through critique and reformation. To address these goals, this dissertation developed a series of questions that were used to analyze and evaluate a representative sample of this educational material and, by doing so, invited deeper discussions regarding questions of pedagogical approach as well as questions about race, class and gender. This work has attempted to include issues of power, privilege and positionality in a discussion of Christianity's relationship to the Other and to the marginalized as reflected in written curriculum.

In this study, I addressed the following research question: "How should Christian religious education materials be evaluated?"

This investigation can be further subdivided:

Sub-questions:

1) How is Christian religious education curricula currently evaluated?

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[6] Ingrid Johnston, *Re-mapping Literary Worlds: Postcolonial Pedagogy in Practice* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2003), 5.

2) What is the goal of Christian religious education curricula? How does this goal shape evaluation (or does it?)

3) How do Christian religious education curricula stand up to evaluation?

4) How do current educational theories impact Christian religious education curricula?

Definitions

Religious Education

One of the emergent issues inherent in any exploration of religious education is clarifying terminology. The term "religious education" is considered by most to have been established as distinct field with the development of the Religious Education Association in 1903.[7] The term "religious education" itself also presents a challenge; with its plurality of objectives and definitions. Wardekker and Miedema "acknowledge that the goals, content and position of religious education are by no means self evident."[8] Consequently, literature reflects this wide variety of permutations and different understandings. Jeff Astley provides a helpful summary of a number of sources to define British Religious Education in the following manner;

> Religious education specifies a general educational activity, usually treated as a part of schooling – including nonsectarian publicly funded schooling that educates children about religion. Currently, this is usually taken to involve an empathic but nonevangelistic and nonformative (often described as nonconfessional) educating activity focused on a variety of religions.[9]

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[7] Jack Seymour, *Mapping Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 13.
[8] W.L Wardekker and S. Miedema "Identity, Cultural Change and Religious Education," *British Journal of Religious Education* 23 no. 2 (2001) 76-87.
[9] Jeff Astley, *Philosophy of Christian Religious Education* (Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1994), 8. Astley's definition is based on the following sources: Michael Grimmt, *What Can I do in RE?* (Great Wakering, England: Mayhew-McCrimmon, 1973), Ninian Smart, *Secular Education and the Logic of Religion* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968); Schools Council, *Religious Education in Secondary Schools* (London: Evans/Methuen, 1971); Peter Gardner, "Religious Education: In Defense of Non-commitment", *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 14:2 (1980).

In North America, religious education can be defined and observed to be similar to British religious education; however, religious education in the North American context has been most often understood as confessional in nature.[10] While most often associated with evangelical Christianity, confessional religious education is not specific to a particular religious tradition and can be observed in the practice of many world religions including Christianity (both Protestant and Catholic denominations), Judaism, and Islam.[11] "Confessional" religious education is an activity that occurs in relation to a church, synagogue, or mosque and is structured by the church, synagogue, or mosque to achieve goals that are specifically church, synagogue, or mosque related.[12]

Christian Religious Education

In this thesis, I examined confessional religious education limited specifically to the Christian tradition. To be concise and for the sake of simplicity, this area could be synthesized and referred to as "Christian Education." However, the phrase "Christian Education" historically carries with it negative implications and overtones of

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[10] Ibid., 8.

[11] The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has conducted multidisciplinary research into professional preparation. This work focuses on the notion of signature pedagogy. Signature pedagogy is idea that any professional discipline (ex: medicine, teaching, law, clergy) has a "salient pervasive teaching practice that characterizes the entire field." This material may provide the researcher with insights into common approaches to Christian Religious Education since practitioners "most often model their own teaching after that which they themselves received." See Lee Schulman. *Signature Pedagogies in the Disciplines*. Daedalus, 134, 3, 52-59.

[12] See representative literature such as David Passig, "Teaching Future Jewish Life Through a Cross-Generation Future-Oriented Curriculum," *Religious Education* 95 No.2 (Spring 2000): 190-214. Susan L. Douglass and Munir A. Shaikh, "Defining Islamic Education: Differentiation and Applications," *Current Issues in Comparative Education* 7 no.1 (2004): 5-18. Douglass and Shaikh note "in their objectives and activities, mosque programs generally correspond to weekend religious instruction conducted in American churches, synagogues and temples." Shaza Khan, Wajahat Husain, and Sehar Masood, "Situating Weekend Islamic Schools in the American Muslim Context. (paper presented at ISNA Education Forum, Chicago, Illinois, April, 2005) http://www.isna.net/uploads/media/Khan_Husain_Masood_-_Weekend_Islamic_School_in_the_Ameri.doc, accessed June 2, 2006.

indoctrination.[13] In an attempt to avoid these connotations, I followed the lead of a number of prominent religious educators and use the term "Christian Religious education"; meaning the "Christian church's task of religious education."[14]

Conflation of Religious Education and Education

Religious education is a discipline within the field of education just as social studies education, math education, science education etc. Close to "home," this placement of religious education in the mainstream curriculum is demonstrated at the University of Alberta where Religious and Moral Education exist as a formal discipline/subject area "minor" within the Department of Secondary Education. Although religious education can be seen as controversial due to its divergent goals or objectives, it has historically drawn on both theological understanding and theories of education. In her influential book "Educating in Faith," Mary C. Boys describes any classic expressions of religious education as a "specific, historical manifestation of educating in faith that has resulted from the intersection of a particular theological perspective with a particular

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[13] Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 29, Groome offers a detailed footnote explaining the controversy surrounding the term Christian Education and attempts to reframe it in a positive light. It is worth quoting at length:
"The criticism of the term *Christian Education* is part of a broader criticism of Christianity as a whole. Both the traditional Marxists and Freudians, among others, would claim that the very use of Christian language militates against the promotion of liberation and human freedom. They see Christianity as either oppressive or repressive. They would seem to have strong historical evidence on their side. But this criticism is rapidly becoming a largely dated nineteenth century one.
It overlooks the Roman Catholic response to such criticism, beginning in the 1890's with the *Rerum Novarum* and increasing with the social encyclicals ever since. It overlooks the Protestant response, also begun in the late 1800's with the Social Gospel movement and continuing down through such people as Reinhold Neibuhr and Paul Tillich into the present day. It overlooks the whole development of 'critical' and 'dialectical' theology over the past twenty-five years (for example the work of Rahner, Lonergan, Moltmann, Metz, Pannenberg, Schillibeeckx, Ruether, Baum, Tracy, Gutierrez and the theologians of the liberation motif) in which it has been rediscovered that Christianity must be a criticism rather than a legitimation of oppressive social systems and cultural arrangements…The term Christian Religious Education points us toward a broader task – to reclaim in consciousness and in reality that Christianity is a social critique and a call to human freedom; that it is a travesty of the essential meaning of the Christ event when it is used to promote or legitimate oppressive enterprises and especially educational ones."
[14] See Astley, *The Philosophy of Christian Religious Education*, 9. Astley opts for the term "Christian religious education" based on the work of leading figures in the field including Thomas Groome, James Michael Lee, John M. Hull and Gabriel Moran.

educational outlook."[15] Recognizing religious education's unique blend of areas, this dissertation will draw on both areas to investigate curriculum.

Curriculum

In their book "Understanding Curriculum," curriculum theorists William Pinar, William Reynolds, Patrick Slattery, and Peter Taubman attest to the proliferation of definitions of curriculum.[16] The fact that there is no one agreed upon definition reflects the complexity of the field. Joseph Schwab's work as a curriculum theorist has challenged those in the curriculum field to re-examine the ways that they had previously looked at curriculum and curriculum development. His notion of the "commonplaces of curriculum" is quite helpful. He refers to the following four "commonplaces;" i) subject matter, ii) educational milieu, iii) learners, iv) teachers. Curriculum is made up of all four components and is shaped by how we emphasize and define these commonplaces.[17]

In current understanding, curriculum is defined as "a plan or program for all experiences which the learner encounters under the direction of the school."[18] While it is clear that curriculum is more than the paper documents used in an educational setting, for the purpose of this research, I will begin by delimiting my research to a document analysis, keeping in mind that such an analysis is only a starting place and that curriculum must and can only be understood in context. The purpose of this dissertation extends past the evaluation of an individual curriculum, but will provide a foundational

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[15] Mary C. Boys, *Educating in Faith: Maps and Visions* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1989), 8.
[16] William F. Pinar, William M. Reynolds, Patrick Slattery and Peter M. Taubman, eds. *Understanding Curriculum* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 26.
[17] Joseph Schwab, *The Practical: A Language for Curriculum*. (Washington, DC: National Education Association, 1970) quoted in *Understanding Curriculum* by William F. Pinar et. al., eds. (New York: Peter Lang, 2004)
[18] P. Oliva, *Developing Curriculum* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982) quoted in *Understanding Curriculum* by William F. Pinar et. al., eds. (New York: Peter Lang, 2004)

work that will hopefully help Christian religious educators better examine any curriculum claiming to be "Christian" with an intellectual and contextual rigor and, in doing so, help those who educate others become more acutely aware of their own pedagogy, philosophies, beliefs and assumptions and how curriculum of any sort might be utilized with children or others. Thus, the intention of this research is to help those who build and utilize Christian religious education curriculua do so with as much insight as possible.

Limitations/Delimitations

The final goal of this dissertation was to create a "tool" for those interested in critically examining Christian religious education curriculua. In an attempt to provide parameters for this dissertation, my approach focuses on document development and analysis. Initially an evaluation tool was established on the basis of personal experience, literature review, as well as limited use of pre-existing evaluation tools. The preliminary tool was used to analyse curriculum documents and then appropriate adaptations to the "tool" were made accordingly. It is my hope that this process has resulted in a useful tool for program evaluation.

Christian religious education is diverse in nature because it is created to address a wide variety of theological and educational contexts. To limit the possibilities and focus on the educational components of Christian religious education curriculua, a specific curriculum was utilized to test the tool as the tool was being designed. Since my education, training and current context is Protestant and specifically Canadian Baptist, I selected a curriculum that was commonly used in Canadian Baptist churches. This strategy allowed me to be a voice from the inside and to speak with integrity within this

context as I am a member of this community. Also, because there is bound to be sensitivity involved in any critique, this seemed to be the least possible offensive design. As noted earlier, I come to this work with some history and, as a result, some bias; however, I am not without sympathy for the enterprise of creating curriculua and corresponding pedagogy in Christian religious education.

Significance of the Study

Historically, there has been a lack of systematic evaluation of Christian religious education material. According to Lewis, Cram and Lee, "what often happens in the end is that vigorous and hard headed marketing devices replace scientific evaluation [of curriculum]."[19] We have become driven by the market to produce and make a profit without seriously examining the material that we are producing. Joseph Bayly, former vice president of David C. Cook Publishing Co.,[20] substantiates this claim explaining that to meet market demands curriculum developers often place the expectations of the church (consumer) above the nature of learner. He states, "Open-ended questions and case studies, intended to stimulate discussion and draw out students' prior knowledge and its application to life situations, are an anathema to many conservative churches."[21] It

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[19] Laura Lewis, Ronald H. Cram, James Michael Lee, "Curriculum and Multicultural Religious Education," in *Multicultural Religious Education* ed. Barbara Wilkerson (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1997), 384. The use of the term "scientific" in this quote refers to a systematic, theoretically based, thorough analysis of curriculum material. It is not intended to imply an approach originating in any science related discipline.

[20] David C. Cook Publishing Co., is an evangelical, nondenominational curriculum publishing house established in the 1800's in Chicago, Illinois. It is one of many similar companies established in this time period and geographical location including Gospel Light and Scripture Press. Their material is widely used in both Canadian and American Protestant Churches.

[21] Joseph Bayly, "Evangelical Curriculum Development," *Religious Education* 75 no. 5 (Sept-Oct 1980), 541.

appears that the limited scope of the consumer is subverting the need for examination of the role of recent developments in understanding children's learning.

Another reason for the lack of evaluation may arise from the volunteer nature of Christian religious education programs in churches. Many leaders understand the existence of theological material and educational theory present within curriculum documents and feel inadequate due to their of lack formal education in one or both of these disciplines. Thus, curriculum evaluation is left to the "professionals" with little or no feedback from the stakeholders. Consequently, within churches, pedagogical material often remains virtually unchallenged.

This dissertation has attempted to contribute to the literature in Christian religious education by raising possible parameters for a thorough method through which to examine and evaluate curricula, recognizing the need for an approach that critically examines the pedagogical approaches that undergird existing Christian religious education materials.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

"To think about the future, it is best to work backward, tracing trajectories to the present moment, carefully working out the lineages that have brought current conditions into being. Only then can thoughts of 'what is to be done' be meaningful."[22]

To begin the literature review, I have examined the approach to evaluation of curriculua in the past. This will attempt to establish a background for the study and reveal areas that might be addressed in future approaches to evaluation.

Definitions

Evaluation

In light of current trends in curricular evaluation, it becomes pertinent to discuss possible definitions of the term "evaluation" and thereby clarify its usage in the body of this dissertation. Barrow and Milburn note the plethora of terms that arise in a discussion of evaluation. "Educational discourse has many words that relate to the broad task of judging the worth of a person, program or piece of work including 'evaluating', 'measuring', assessing, appraising, examining, testing, marking, grading and scoring. Although often confused they are not synonymous."[23]

The purposes of any scheme of evaluation will vary according to the purposes, views, conceptions of the person or persons conducting the evaluation. Part of the confusion that surrounds evaluation terminology arises from the disagreement that exists

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22 David Geoffrey Smith, "Curriculum and Teaching Face Globalization," in *International Handbook of Curriculum Research* ed. William F. Pinar (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2003), 37.

23 Robin Barrow and Geoffrey Millburn, "Evaluation," in *A Critical Dictionary of Educational Concepts: An Appraisal of Selected Ideas in Educational Theory and Practice*. 2nd ed.

in regard to the purpose of evaluation. Generally curriculum evaluation will be understood as "the process by which we attempt to gauge the value and effectiveness of any particular piece of educational activity."[24]

In this dissertation, the goal of the research was to develop a tool for evaluation of the educational components of Christian religious education curriculua. It is my hope that the development of this tool will lead to conversations about the approach to teaching and the manner in which material is disseminated. My intention is to offer a voice regarding curriculum development in this area. I would like to "explore not only whether the curriculum is being delivered effectively but also and more crucially whether it is worth delivering. And we need to do this in order to effect justifiable change and improvement."[25] These goals impact the approach that I have taken in regard to evaluation.

Stakeholders

Within a process of curriculua evaluation, different groups of people or stakeholders are impacted by the curriculum and are thereby interested in the process. These "stakeholders" may have divergent views and can influence decisions regarding curricular change. Some stakeholders may include educators using the material, parents, program administrators and curriculum evaluators etc.[26] Each of these individual groups can have vastly different agendas that motivate their approaches to curriculum evaluation. For example, educators might be interested in best practices, while parents might be interested in the specific needs of their children and program administrators and

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24 Kelly, *The Curriculum: Theory and Practice*, 137.
25 Ibid., 148.
26 Marvin C. Alkin and Ernest R. House, "Evaluation of Programs" in *Encyclopedia of Educational Research,* v.2.

curriculum evaluators might have political motivations. It is important to recognize that the education is complex and many people and parties are specifically impacted by the material presented.

Assessment and Measurement

Assessment and measurement are terms often confused with evaluation. It is important to recognize the difference in terminology. Worthen and Dusen offer the following clarification. "Obviously these are related - measurement is typically aimed at simple quantitative description, individual learner assessment usually diagnoses or compares individual's performance, system assessment is aimed at reflecting the overall status of the system on those areas assessed and evaluation attempts to determine the worth or merit in relation to specific criteria often using measurement in the process."[27] This concise definition allows the reader to discern the specific difference between measurement, assessment, and evaluation. In short, evaluation offers a broader perspective.

History of Curriculum Evaluation

Beginning with the earliest record of individual evaluation, the notion of evaluation has been enhanced and developed over the past decades.[28] Within educational discourse, evaluation has expanded and is included in a variety of capacities; it is

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27 B.R. Worthen and L.M. Van Dusen, "Evaluation, Nature of" in *International Encyclopedia of Education 2nd Ed.* (1994).
28 Marvin C. Alkin and Ernest R. House, "Evaluation of Programs" in *Encyclopedia of Educational Research,* v.2.

generally agreed to have been formalized and considered a specific discipline in 1940s with the work of Ralph Tyler.[29] Tyler suggested that "four fundamental questions must be answered in developing any curriculum and plan of instruction:

1) What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?

2) What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?

3) How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?

4) How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained?[30]

Following in the footsteps of Tyler, the field of educational evaluation grew and was firmly established by the 1960s.[31] In these years, three seminal papers were written in the area of curriculum evaluation. According to curriculum theorists Pinar et al., these articles changed the way evaluation was understood and went on to make a major impact in the discipline; 1) Michael Scriven's "The Countenance of Educational Evaluation," which focuses on an examination of formative and summative evaluation; 2) Robert Stake's Responsive Evaluation, which "broadens the concept of evaluation by criticizing mainstream specialists for viewing the educative process with a microscope rather than a panoramic view finder;"[32] and 3) Elliot Eisner's Educational Objectives: Help or Hinderance, which confronts the conventional, previously structured, "scientific" approach to curriculum evaluation.

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[29] Ralph Tyler, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1949)

[30] Ibid. i.

[31] Marvin C. Alkin and Ernest R. House, "Evaluation of Programs" in *Encyclopedia of Educational Research,* v.2.

[32] Pinar, et al., *Understanding Curriculum*, 26.

In more recent years, the area of evaluation has continued to grow and evolve. Many researchers have made significant contributions to the field; Michael Quinn Patton's work on developmental evaluation is an example. Patton argues that evaluation is actually a crucial part of the design of any program. He defines developmental evaluation as follows:

> Evaluation processes and activities that support program, project, product, personnel and/or organization development (usually the latter). The evaluator is part of a team whose members collaborate to conceptualize, design and test new approaches in a long-term, ongoing process of continuous improvement, adaptation and intentional change. The evaluator's primary function in the team is to elucidate team discussions with evaluative data and logic, and to facilitate data-bases decision-making in the developmental process.[33]

Despite these theoretical advances in evaluation theory, curriculum evaluation itself has become increasingly political and focused solely on objectives. Regrettably, curriculum evaluation has changed over the past few decades so that its focus has gone from an interest in the quality of programs and curriculum to a measure of effectiveness of teachers, curriculum and student success.[34] This limited approach is chiefly concerned with whether or not students subjected to a particular curriculum are able to meet the expectations established in the listed outcomes.[35] Government organizations and departments of education have frequently been concerned with being able to assess accomplishment through an objectives focus.

> A good deal of both the theory and the practice of curriculum evaluation therefore, …has been set within the context of an objectives based curriculum model and for this reason evaluation has been seen as centrally concerned to help with the framing and subsequent modification of objectives, the assessment of the suitability of the learning experiences to the achievement of the objectives set and

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[33] Michael Quinn Patton. Developmental Evaluation. *Evaluation Practice* 5, (1994), 317.

[34] A.V. Kelly, *The Curriculum: Theory and Practice.* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications Ltd., 2004), 13.

35 George J. Posner, *Analyzing the Curriculum,* 2nd ed. (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Inc., 1995), 228.

> the measurement of the degree to which the pre-stated objectives are being or have been attained. [36]

The objectives-related focus of current curriculum evaluation has limited its usefulness causing the focus to be on achievement as opposed to development and improvement of approaches to curriculum development.

A.V. Kelly acknowledges that this trend towards evaluation as accountability as opposed to evaluation as an essential part of curriculum development is also being seen in the UK.[37] This "simplistic, product based, aims and objectives, target centered approach" overlooks the complexities and intricacies contained within curriculum which are considered and examined as part of curriculum development and planning.[38]

Approaches to Evaluation

In general, methodology for curriculum evaluation falls into two categories - formative and summative. A.V. Kelly draws on the works of Scriven and Stake to explain that formative evaluation is "concerned to provide feedback and thus a base for course improvement, modification and future planning."[39] A formative evaluation is often the task of a curriculum developer because she/he is interested in obtaining information that will assist with program improvement and future development. [40]

Summative evaluation is "concerned with appraisal of the work; it is a form of 'pay-off' evaluation and is concerned primarily to ascertain if the goals of the course

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[36] Kelly, *The Curriculum: Theory and Practice*, 139.
37 Ibid., 136.
38 Ibid., 140.
37 Kelly, *The Curriculum: Theory and Practice*, 137.
40 John D. McNeil. *Contemporary Curriculum in Thought and Action*. 6th ed. (Toronto: John Wiley and Sons Inc., 2006), 201.

have been achieved."[41] Summative evaluation is commonly used in decisions regarding program's adoption or continuation.

Within current research regarding curriculum evaluation, different researchers and authors propose a variety of different approaches to the process. According to George Posner, there are a number of different summative approaches to curriculum evaluation depending on the nature of the curriculum itself. He suggests the following approaches: 1) traditional, 2) experiential, 3) behavioral, 4) structure of disciplines and 5) cognitive.[42] According to Posner, the "traditional" approach to curriculum evaluation coincides with older approaches to curriculum. "Traditional" curriculum was primarily concerned with transfer of information and fact from the teacher to the student. Consequently, "traditional" forms of curriculum evaluation were chiefly concerned with whether students had been able to obtain the presented information. Posner's "experiential" approach to curriculum evaluation focused on the particular curricular experiences and the impact these experiences had on students over a long and short period. In contrast to the experiential approach, the "behavioral approach" which Posner describes looks at students' acquisition of skills as outlined in the curriculum outcomes. The fourth approach to curriculum evaluation Posner describes is what he calls the "structure of disciplines" approach. In this case, "evaluation seeks to measure the knowledge students acquire, the nature of inquiry in which students engage and the conceptual structure of the content taught." [43] Posner's final approach is called "cognitive" curriculum evaluation. This approach to evaluation accentuates students' cognitive (thinking) skills.

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41 Kelly, *The Curriculum: Theory and Practice*, 137.
42 Posner, *Analyzing the Curriculum*, 232.

43 Ibid., 232.

Evaluators highlight students' ability to obtain fundamental concepts and apply them in varying situations.

In 1975, Parlett and Hamilton published a paper on curriculum evaluation entitled *Evaluation as Illuminative*. In this document the authors put forth the idea that evaluation ought to be concerned with "description and interpretation rather than measurement and prediction."[44] The goal of this type of evaluation is to offer insights and explanations to those making curricular decisions about a particular project.

Another significant approach to curriculum evaluation was established by leading evaluation scholar Robert Stake. His understanding of evaluation is referred to as *Evaluation as responsive*. Stake's perspective is concerned with the needs of the curriculum stakeholders. His approach to evaluation is structured so that it takes into account the desires and intentions of those involved with the curriculum whether they are experts, journalists, teachers, students, parents, administrators etc. John D. McNeil reflects on Stake's contribution remarking that, "Robert Stake was one of the first evaluators to propose the pluralist argument that the evaluator should make known the criteria or standards that are being employed and who holds them."[45] In this approach, it is the responsibility of the evaluator to ascertain information regarding what stakeholders want to know and to proceed using this as a foundation for the evaluation process. [46]

Evaluation as critical inquiry is another approach to curriculum evaluation that is concerned with multiple perspectives. McNeil notes;

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44 See M. Partlett and D.Hamilton, (1972), "Evaluation as Illumination: A New Approach to the Study of Innovatory Programmes." in *Beyond the Numbers Game: A Reader in Education Evaluation*, eds. D. Hamilton, D. Jenkins, C. King, B. MacDonald, and M.Partlett. (London: Macmillan), 1972.

[45] McNeil, *Contemporary Curriculum in Thought and Action*, 204.
[46] Ibid., 204.

> Pluralistic evaluation, especially critical inquiry and authentic assessment is consistent with the rise of professionalism and the school as the center for evaluative focus. Accordingly responsibility, learning and change become more important than scoreboard accountability. Such evaluation includes teachers, students, administrators, parents, community members and possibly a researcher from the university. As they focus on curriculum matters like content, goals, learning opportunities and grouping, participants create a new awareness, knowledge and values. [47]

This approach involves making ethical decisions about established goals; and deciding whether they are worth addressing. Thus the focus of this type of evaluation is on the implications of the goals for students' education as well as achievement rates. For many "critical" researchers, evaluation is a valuing activity in which evaluators (members of the school community) make explicit their operant values, beliefs and ideologies as they critically examine school practices enlightened by experimental data.[48]

Limitations of Educational Evaluation

Over the years, evaluators have come to recognize that the process of curriculum evaluation is a valuable enterprise; however, it has many inherent limitations. One of the most significant limitations is based on the recent emergence of student assessment focused evaluation. Educator A.V. Kelly recognizes "that an approach to evaluation which restricts itself to a concern with the assessment of pupil performance…will offer no evidence at all which may have a bearing on whether that curriculum is worth delivering".[49] Kelly goes on to explain that this simplistic student assessment approach to evaluation does not assist with on-going curriculum development. Michael Apple and Landon Beyer note "the dominance of curriculum evaluation based on achievement tests"

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47 Ibid., 218.
48 Ibid., 205.
[49] Kelly, *The Curriculum: Theory and Practice*, 148.

is an unrealistic approach that fails to take into consideration the "socio-economic reality of schools."[50] Apple and Beyer also point out that the concept of neutrality often associated with evaluators is impossible and neglects the fact that all evaluators serve their own interests to some degree in their approaches. This bias is also seen in the stated purposes of the evaluators. Such biases are often imbedded in the structure and approach that evaluators select when examining curricular issues.[51]

Another area that can be particularly challenging for the curriculum evaluator is the many conflicting interests of the stakeholders. The competing interests of stakeholders may cause an evaluation to lack generalizability and may lead to limited practical suggestions or recommendations for improvement[52] Many evaluators will select an approach to evaluation which does not fit the purpose of the project. Worthen and Dusen suggest that;

> Narrow rigid adherence to single evaluation approaches must give way to more mature, sophisticated evaluations that welcome diversity....Evaluators who accept that challenge can enjoy the benefits of careful tailoring rather than selecting of 'one-size fits all' evaluation approach.[53]

Consequently, it is important that evaluators recognize the importance of using an eclectic approach to evaluation borrowing from a variety of approaches so that the specific needs of the research can be met.

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50 Michael Apple and Landon Beyer. "Social Evaluation of Curriculum" in *Transforming Curriculum for a Culturally Diverse Society*. Etta Hollins ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1996), 273.
51 Ibid., 276.
52 B.R. Worthen and L.M. Van Dusen, "Evaluation, Nature of" in *International Encyclopedia of Education 2nd Ed.* (1994)
53 Ibid.

Historical approaches to Evaluation of Christian Religious Education Curricula

Within the discipline of Christian religious education, critical academic attention to curriculum evaluation and analysis has been largely overlooked. This absence of research in the field of Christian Religious education is reflected in the lack of available literature on the subject. "A review of the literature yields a number of sources that present ideas for organizing and conducting Sunday and Sabbath schools. However, the number of empirical studies related to teaching and learning in Sunday/Sabbath schools is limited."[54] The available studies are often limited in focus and superficial. Most research related to Christian religious education curricula has been in the form of "field test studies" and "teacher response surveys to help curriculum developers make material clearer, well-organized and user friendly."[55] Although these consumer- focused evaluations are both valuable and important, critical curriculum evaluation continues to be ignored. Curriculum evaluation research has been practical in nature and often contains a series of basic questions rather than a rigorous guide for evaluating curriculum.[56]

Christian Educator Perry Downs developed an evaluation template in 1976. His approach, geared to Christian Education professionals, is both sensible and useful. He suggests these criteria:

1) Content: What does it say? a) Biblical orientation b) Christian values c) life issues d) age group orientation

2) Philosophy: How is it designed? a) life orientation b) response orientation c) home or family orientation d) organizing principle

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54 Larry D. Burton, Elaine Paraschi, Donna Habenicht, and Candice Hollingsead, "Curriculum Design and Children's Learning at Church," *Religious Education* 101, no. 1 (Winter 2006), 7.
[55] Laura Lewis, "Teachers' Guides and Teachers' Choices: Is Lesson Planning by the Book?" *Religious Education* 89 no. 1 (January 1994), 80.
[56] *Harpers Encyclopedia of Religious Education* (1990), s. v. "Curriculum, " by H.A. Archibald.

3) Methodology: How does it help? a) creative techniques b) teaching aids c) study aids d) flexibility e) supplementary materials

4) Mechanical Features: a) layout b) color c) pictures d) quality

5) Price: a) price b) affordability. [57]

While insightful as a beginning point, I agree that Downs' criteria need to be adapted to compensate for the radical changes in both educational and theological approaches that have been developed in the last 40 years.

In recent years, Christian religious educators have recognized the importance of quality religious education materials and research is beginning to reflect this concern.[58] "Religious groups are being told to pay closer attention to the multitude of ways that their members are learning informally and incidentally and to build on that knowledge to improve institutional effectiveness."[59] One of the most interesting and encouraging examples is Karen J. Cross' evaluation entitled "Analysis of Life Curriculum for White Cultural Bias," published in 2003. In this study, Cross examines racism, classism, suburbanism and biases as criteria for evaluating curriculum documents. Her conclusion states, "Our religious materials today reflect a splintered and isolated humanity that

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[57] Lin Johnson ,"Understanding and Using Curriculum," in *Christian Education: Foundations for the Future* eds., Robert E. Clark, Lin Johnson, Allyn K. Sloat (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991),499-501.Lin Johnson makes reference to an unpublished curriculum evaluation template developed by Dr. Perry Downs. In an email correspondence with Dr. Perry Downs, Associate Dean at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Dr. Downs stated that this template was quite useful in his work with curriculum publishing houses but needed to be updated in light of postmodernism and its influences on education. For other similar examples see: Rita Harrison review of *Faith Weaver Bible Curriculum and Hands on Bible Curriculum,* published by Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, Inc. Anglican Theological Review 86:4 (Fall, 2004): 687-689 and Ron Mills, "Press Toward Excellence – Think Deliberately about Curriculum and Christian Education." The Clergy Journal (April 2003): 3-5.

[58] C. Dykstra and J.B Wigger, " A brief history of a genre problem: Presbyterian Educational Resource Materials," in *The Pluralistic Vision: Presbyterian and Mainstream Protestant Education and Leadership* eds., M. Coalter, J. Mulder and L. Weeks (Louisville Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press 1992.

[59] Leona English, "The Subversive Curriculum: What Religious Educators are Learning Informally and Incidentally," *Religious Education* 95 no. 02 (Spring 2000), 167.

credits the White culture as the preferred way."[60] Cross' analysis invites the Christian religious education community to begin to ask the difficult questions that underlie the development of curricula.

Lewis, Cram and Lee echo this desire to understand complexity stating, "Therefore cultural and textual analysis – including the dynamics of power and discrimination – is a crucial first step for those interested in curriculum evaluation."[61] Christian religious educators need to be aware of the many assumptions, ideas and factors such as families, schools, communities, and the larger society that impact the development of curriculum.[62]

My examination of Christian Religious Education curriculua evaluation has revealed a number of areas to be addressed. Clearly there is a need to evaluate the suitability of the curriculua for diverse environments and populations. In education theory there has been a great deal of research in the area of multicultural education, anti-racism and postcolonial theory. These areas could open important conversations in religious education.

Trends in Educational Theory

Multicultural Education

Religious education, as a discipline, has been traditionally slow to address issues of diversity. This slowness is reflected in what seems to be insufficient attention given to racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination. Russell Moy explains this apparent inadequacy in no uncertain terms:

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[60] Karen J. Cross, "Analysis of Life Curriculum for White Cultural Bias," *Religious Education* 98 no. 02 (Spring 2003), 257.
[61] Laura Lewis, Ronald H. Cram, James Michael Lee, "Curriculum and Multicultural Religious Education," in *Multicultural Religious Education* ed. Barbara Wilkerson (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1997), 329.
[62] Robert Pazmino, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 139.

> Many religious educators may feel uncomfortable in raising potentially explosive racial issues. This fear may explain why race is null curriculum within our religious education dialogue. Major textbooks in religious education either omit race completely or mention it in passing as part of examples or illustrations. See Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Harper, 1980), 99 and his *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry* (San Francisco, 1991), 402; John Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 67; C. Ellis Nelson, *Where Faith Begins* (Richmond: John Knox, 1967), 64-65; Donald E. Miller, *Story and Context* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 32 and Mary C. Boys, *Educating in Faith: Maps and Visions* (San Francisco: Harper, 1989), 181.[63]

Although these writers have been essential to religious educational discourse, according to Moy, they appear to be generally disinterested in issues of race, class and gender. In recent decades, religious educators have recognized the need to reflect the diversity that globalization has underscored. In a content analysis of the key journal "Religious Education," Leona English et al. note that "the Journal concerned itself with a number of social issues....Some of these issues are globalization, literacy, racism, holocaust, social toxicity, ecology, child abuse, parenting styles, business ethics, AIDS, bullying, disbelief, multiculturalism, pluralism, gun war and violence."[64]

According to leading social studies theorist James A. Banks, multicultural education found its roots in "the early ethnic studies movement initiated by scholars such as G.W. Williams, Dubois, Woodson, Bond and Wesley."[65] Although these authors' writings provided a theoretical foundation for multicultural education; it only developed as a separate discipline within education in the 1960s and 1970s. As a humanitarian movement seeking to (and continuing to) provide justice and equity for non-white, non-

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[63] Russell G Moy, "American Racism: The Null Curriculum in Religious Education," *Religious Education* 95 no.2 (Spring 2000), 131.

[64] Leona English, Mario O. D'Souza and Leon Chartrand. "Analysis of Content, Contributors and Research Directions: Mapping Publication Routes in the Journal," *Religious Education* 100 no.1 (Winter 2005), 17.

65 James A. Banks, "Multicultural Education: Historical Development, Dimensions and Practice," in *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education* eds., Banks, J.A. and C.A. McGee Banks (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers, 2001), 10.

English speaking students in a predominantly Eurocentric educational context, multicultural education, in its inception, was a result of growing recognition of racial and ethnic inequality in academic performance, educational opportunities and the school system as a whole.[66]

Subsequent attempts to meet the needs of this audience resulted in what Banks describes as four approaches to multicultural curricular reform: (1) the Contributions Approach; (2) the Additive Approach; (3) the Transformation Approach; and (4) the Social Action Approach. The philosophy behind these approaches is detailed; for the purposes of this research, I believe the following quote suffices:

> In the contributions approach heroes, heroines, holidays, foods and discrete cultural elements are celebrated occasionally. Using the additive approach content, concepts, lessons and units are added to the curriculum without changing its structure. In the transformation approach, the structure of the curriculum is changed to enable students to view concepts, issues, events and themes from the perspectives of diverse ethnic and cultural groups. The social action approach involves students making decisions on important personal, social and civic problems and taking actions to solve them.[67]

The proliferation of literature encompassing these approaches to multicultural education has generated not only a great deal of controversy but also many improvements in schooling as well. In response to some of the criticisms levelled against multicultural education, theorists are turning their attention to the interrelated issues of race, class and gender and their impact on education.[68] Constant adaptations are leading the multicultural education movement to reflect the complexity of the societal context.

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[66] Geneva Gay, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research and Practice* (New York: Teacher's College Press, 2000), 26.

[67] James A. Banks, "Multicultural Education: Historical Development, Dimensions and Practice," 12-13.

[68] See C.A. Grant and C.E. Sleeter, "Race, Class and Gender in Education Research: An Argument for Integrative Analysis, " *Review of Educational Research* 56 (1986), 195-211.

Most countries around the world have at one time aspired to maintain a unitary, homogeneous nation-state identity. Will Kymlicka writes, "an increasing number of Western democracies have abandoned this goal [monocultural identity] in favour of a more multicultural model of the state." [69]This move toward a multicultural state has encompassed a wide variety of approaches to addressing assimilation and adaptations to legislation and institutions. The subsequent results and actual manifestations of attempts to adopt multicultural models vary drastically from one jurisdiction to another. As a corollary, the multiplicity of resulting interpretations and implementations of multicultural citizenship in Canada is not unanticipated.

Canada is historically diverse, as evidenced in the plethora of studies that attest to the multi-ethnic and multi-racial nature of the population.[70] Consequently, the federal government has instituted a policy designed to acknowledge, honour and promote this plurality. This institutionalizing of plurality was seen in two specific governmental actions: first, in 1971, under Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau the results of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism were accepted by Parliament and, most recently, in the Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988. Its aim is to "recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage."[71] This policy has had a direct impact on education.

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[69] Will Kymlicka. Multicultural States and Intercultural Citizens. *Theory and Research in Education* 1 no.2 (2003), 149.

[70] For example, see Y. Abu-Laban. Welcome/STAY OUT: Canadian Integration and Immigrant Adaptation at the Millennium. *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 30:3 (1998), 2. or F. Henry and C. Tator. *The Color of Democracy: Racism in Canadian Society.* 3rd ed. (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 2005).

[71] Bill C-93, An Act for the Preservation and Enhancement of Multiculturalism in Canada, July 12, 1988.

> Many schools and school boards in Canada are now adopting policies to foster multicultural awareness and anti-racist action – adapting their curricula to suit the increasing ethnic diversity in their student populations and local communities formulating regulations to counter discrimination and inequities, and promoting the capacities of students and school staff to appreciate and interact with other cultures in Canada.[72]

Because Canadian education falls under provincial jurisdiction, the interpretation of the multicultural act and the subsequent implementation of programs in schools have been varied. Cummings, Mackay and Sakyi note: "in Canada and elsewhere, multicultural education has often appeared as a diffuse desire or a goal dependent on local initiatives and circumstances rather than an established, uniform curriculum practice."[73] Not surprisingly, this lack of concrete application of multicultural education theory has generated criticisms from many arenas, including parents and educators, regarding the effectiveness of the programs, particularly when the dropout rates of Black/African Canadians, First Nations/Aboriginals and Portuguese Canadians remain higher than in the general student population.[74]

Multicultural Education and Religious Education

In religious education in both the United States and in Canada, attention to issues around diversity has been conspicuously absent until the past few decades. Russell Moy encapsulates this point when he states: "Religious educators, in neglecting to account for race in their theories, have ignored the historical legacy of institutional racism. In fact, religious education has demonstrated an inadequate response to race and racism

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72 Alister Cummings, Ronald Mackay and Alfred Sakyi. "Learning Processes in a Canadian Exchange Program for Multicultural, Anti-Racist Education, " Canadian Journal of Education 19:4 (1994), 399- 400.
73 Ibid., 400

74 George Sefa Dei, "Challenges for Anti-Racist Educators in Ontario Today," *Orbit* 33 no. 3 (2003), 2.

throughout its history."[75] As a result, this legacy of deficiency persists in the theory, research and practice of religious education. To remedy this situation, educators and theorists have entered into discussion and implemented principles derived from multicultural educational theory as practised in other disciplines.

The introduction of tenets of multicultural education into school-based religious education programs has been widely accepted and continues to be adapted by educational theorists.[76] However, the transition has been more difficult in Church-based religious education programs. Moy helpfully articulates this historical neglect:
"Without understanding the hidden 'racial history' of the United States, religious educators implicitly accepted the image of America as a melting pot, which excluded racial-ethnic minorities. This can be seen in how Sunday School material has been historically constructed."[77] Sunday School curriculum tended to 'normalize' white Christianity in North America and this perspective became embedded in theology, thereby disguising the need for a critical examination of educational approach or methodology. It is difficult to challenge these embedded ideas, as Karen Cross has elucidated: "While the conversation about multiculturalism within religious education circles has been ongoing for the past twenty five years, our churches remain entrenched in a pervasive cultural bias."[78] This inattention to issues of race is seen in textbooks, policies, theology, curriculum documents and the church environment as well as in academic publications. A survey of Religious Education spanning eighty-eight years

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[75] Moy, "*American Racism: The Null Curriculum in Religious Education,*" 120.
76 See detailed overview of multicultural education and its implementation in James A. Banks, "*Multicultural Education: Historical Development, Dimensions and Practice,*" 3-24.
[77] Moy, "*American Racism: The Null Curriculum in Religious Education,*" 126.
[78] Cross, "*Analysis of LiFE Curriculum for White Cultural Bias,*" 241.

(1906 to 1994) "revealed imbalanced treatment of people of color, with a content ranging from barely concealed white paternalism to whole issues devoted to race relations."[79]

The rate of progress in the integration of multicultural education in the field of religious education appears to be nearly imperceptible but is, in fact, an ongoing concern for many educators, theologians and theorists. To avoid perpetuating racism, discrimination and exclusion, I believe that religious education curriculum developers need to implement theology, utilize biblical texts and teach in a manner that incorporates a variety of racial-ethnic perspectives. Moore et al.. suggest that urgency to address this issue has increased and there is a desire among the religious education community to seek new approaches and visions for Religious Education. Moore et al.. propose "engaging in post-colonial analysis, de-centering assumptions, searching for a story to claim, taking time and entering deep waters."[80] Because I care deeply about how my faith - Christianity - is taught, my goal in completing this research was to help reconcile the best pedagogy with the best theology. It would be almost shameful if the content of the faith were eroded by the process of pedagogy and by misrepresenting and/or mis-teaching the loving acceptance of all people that is the basis of Christian faith.

Anti-racism

Multicultural education is seen by its critics as dealing with individual attitudes towards racism and discrimination, whereas anti-racist education is regarded as seeking to change both individual and systemic racism in institutions. Some anti-racist educators

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[79] Moy, "*American Racism: The Null Curriculum in Religious Education*," 127.
[80] Mary Elizabeth Moore, Boyung Lee, Katherine Turpin, Ralph Caas, Lynn Bridgers and Veronica Miles, "Realities, Visions and Promises of a Multicultural Future," *Religious Education* 99 no. 3 (Summer 2004), 287.

"tend to see 'multicultural' education as an attempt by White society and the White educational system to react to and contain the Black struggle against racism and inequality."[81] However, more recently there has been a movement acknowledging the necessity and integration of both approaches. Some scholars argue that a gulf does not need to exist between the two approaches, but rather both are required to address the individual and corporate nature of racism.[82]

Religious Education has slowly begun to adopt a mainstream approach to multiculturalism; however, mainstream education has adjusted to disadvantages that religious education has not yet addressed. The criticism towards its original inadequacies have been articulated by Kehoe and Mansfield, as follows: "Multicultural education has not produced a concrete, uniform methodology or classroom transferability and this has caused some multicultural programs to be seen as naïve, perpetuating racism, superficial but more seriously unable to address the reality of the lack of employment opportunities, material inequities and discrimination experienced by minorities.[83] This area is one to which religious education must still respond.

Attempts to address these inadequacies in mainstream education have led to the development and implementation of anti-racist education.[84] Both in terms of theoretical and practical approaches to racial inequality, anti-racism education found its origin in the United States and Britain. It was the visible minorities of these nations, in particular black parents, who perpetuated a response to educational deficiencies pertaining to academic

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81 Peter Figueroa, "Multicultural Education in the United Kingdom: Historical Development and Current Status." in *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education,* J.A Banks and C.A. McGee Banks, eds. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers, 2001), 792.
82 Ibid., 793.
83 John Kehoe and Earl Mansfield. "The Limitations Multicultural Education and Anti-Racist Education," *Multicultural Perspectives* 15, Nos. 2/3 (1993), 6.
84 George Sefa Dei, *Anti-Racism Education: Theory and Practice* (Halifax, Fernwood, 1996), 16.

achievement.[85] Anti-racism discourse has permeated the American and the Canadian educational landscape. In many Canadian provinces, schools are now implementing multicultural and anti-racist action policies. "Some theorists have directed our attention to specific developments in Ontario, where "multicultural education had widely been reformulated as 'anti-racist education' in response to dramatic demographic changes in urban and suburban school populations, analyses exposing institutionalized discrimination against visible minorities and much-publicized, violent incidents in schools and urban areas." [86]

The goal of anti-racism education is to recognize the reality of inequality inherent in the school system and to strive to create a barrier-free educational opportunity, wherein all students regardless of race, class, gender are equal. George Sefa Dei's verbalization of this intent is worth quoting at length:

> The central thrust of anti-racism education is to change institutional and organizational policies and practices that have a discriminatory impact to change individual attitudes and behaviours that reinforce racial bias and inequality. Anti-racism education is based on the principle that race, despite the concept's lack of scientific foundation, is anchored in the experiences of racial minorities in society and in the school and that anti-racism is a tool for social change.[87]

In many cases this approach to education has been difficult to utilize in the school context because it requires a thorough self-examination and recognition of the systemic discrimination that is part of the hidden curriculum in most schools. On the surface, educators speak of a desire to create a learning environment that is welcoming and provides equal opportunities for all students. However, these good intentions are often

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85 For more information, refer to Frances Henry, Carol Tator, Winston Mattis and Tim Rees, *The Colour of Democracy: Racism in Canadian Society* (Toronto: Thomson Nelson, 1998), 251.
86 Cummings, Mackay and Sakyi, "*Learning Processes in a Canadian Exchange Program for Multicultural, Anti-Racist Education*," 401.
87 Dei, *Anti-Racism Education: Theory and Practice*, 16.

subverted by an unconscious desire to maintain the structure that elevated the dominant culture these educators most often represent. This barrier or resistance makes the implementation of anti-racist approaches to education difficult to incorporate into mainstream schooling.

Initially, multicultural and anti-racist approaches to education were seen in juxtaposition to each other. Furthermore, multicultural education was thought to be the underdeveloped sibling. Anti-racist approaches did not share the limitations of multicultural education because they tended to incorporate "differentiated discussion of how different groups experience racism and the interconnections it draws among different kinds of oppression such as gender and racial oppression." The consequent analysis of outlook is advantageous because it demands a critique of systemic racism and its varying effects on visible minorities.[88]

Definition of Postcolonial

Postcolonial theory has been developed in response to colonialism. Since the western education system was created in a colonial context, postcolonial discourse is a valid lens through which to examine and dispute both systemic and inherent racist and discriminatory theory and praxis.

The ambiguity and fluidity of a term such as 'postcolonial' can be better defined through an understanding of colonialism. Oxford English Dictionary defines 'colonialism' as "the practice or policy of maintaining colonies; now frequently derogatory, the alleged policy of exploitation of weaker peoples." This notion is most often associated with the ambitions and actions of a number of European countries over

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88 Kogila A Moodley, "Multicultural Education in Canada: Historical Development and Current Status," in *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*, J.A. Banks and C.A. McGee Banks, eds., (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers, 2001), 813.

the past five hundred years. The destructive impact of colonization, on a global scale, is ongoing and staggering in its scope and consequences. As implied by its definition, colonialism has led to assimilation, decimation of culture and language, loss of power and agency and genocide, to offer a few examples. In Canada, the salient effects of European colonization are experienced by many groups but most explicitly by its First Nations peoples. "Decades of colonialist subjugation and demeaning clientelism have diminished Canada's lustre as a pacesetter in aboriginal affairs. Annual reports of Canada's Human Rights Commission routinely castigate the government's treatment of aboriginal peoples as the country's most egregious human rights violation."[89]

Although "post" on first glance implies that colonialism has ended, postcolonial theory acknowledges its ongoing impressions as well as instances where it continues. In this case, "post" is "a marker of spatial challenge of the occupying powers of the West by the ethical, political and aesthetic forms of the marginalized."[90] Postcolonial theory offers an opportunity for dialogue regarding the assumptions that underpin forms of representation, value systems, construction of knowledge and norms. As John McLeod states in *Beginning Postcolonialism*: "Postcolonialism, as we have seen in part involves the challenge to colonial ways of knowing, 'writing back' in opposition to such views." [91]

Postcolonial Discourse

Multicultural education and anti-racist education have contributed to the recognition of marginalization in the school system. Both provide practical as well as theoretical shifts in their respective approaches. The recent development of postcolonial

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[89] Augie Fleras and Jean Leonard Elliott, *Unequal Relations: An Introduction to Race, Ethnic and Aboriginal Dynamics in Canada* (Toronto: Prentice Hall, 1999), 7.
[90] Greg Dimitriadis and Cameron McCarthy, *Reading and Teaching the Postcolonial: From Baldwin to Basquiat and Beyond* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001), 7.
91 John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 32.

discourse and its application to disciplines such as English, theology and education has served to broaden the discussion surrounding the positionality of the "Other." Ultimately, self-examination, evidenced in postcolonial thought, may help educators acknowledge systemic and individual shortcomings as a means of providing education that is emancipatory in nature.

Freire writes, "There is no such thing as a neutral education process." He further notes, "Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes "the practice of freedom."[92] By this statement he is suggesting that people are enabled by their own freedom to adjudicate their reality in which they have found themselves and transform it at their will and to their satisfaction.

Three leading theorists in postcolonial discourse are Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak. Each of these scholars has introduced significant concepts that have come to form the infrastructure of postcolonial theory. Said's book *Orientalism* is a seminal work that presents the basis for examining the Western interpretations and understandings of the Orient. Said defines Orientalism as:

> a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other.[93]

Said's exposure of the construction of Otherness and the power and hegemony inherent in this construct is essential to beginning a conversation about postcolonial theory.

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92 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1970), 15.
93 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 1.

Homi Bhabha's complex use of Lacanian psychoanalysis, Derridian deconstruction, as well as other challenging postmodern concepts, make his work difficult to comprehend; nonetheless, it has had a profound and lasting impact on postcolonial studies. In his *Location of Culture*, he examines the impact of colonization and introduces the notions of ambivalence or hybridity, liminality and the Third space. In these liminal spaces there is a disruption of the dominant narratives and an opportunity for transformative pedagogical approaches to emerge. Bhabha emphasizes this as he encourages discussion around cultural difference as opposed to cultural diversity: "The enunciation of cultural difference problematizes the binary division of past and present, tradition and modernity, at the level of cultural representation and its authoritative address." Bhabha's understanding of liminality and reduction of binary divisions is further explicated in his comments of the notion of the Third space: "It is that Third space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew."[94]

Gayatri Spivak's famous article entitled *Can the Subaltern Speak?* has influenced theorists across a wide variety of disciplines including education. Spivak critiques the position of the "subaltern" in relation to the colonizer. Spivak emphasizes the loss of agency, voice and position experienced by those in oppressed people groups. She argues that we need to be committed to the telling of history in such a way that it is appropriate and nonexploitative in nature. According to Spivak and crucial in the practice of religious education, we need to "insist that the colonized subaltern subject is irretrievably

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[94] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 35 and 37.

heterogeneous."[95] Ideas developed by these theorists are foundational to postcolonial theory and will be helpful in this investigation of religious education curriculum development.

Whiteness

Problematizing otherness and examining positions of power within multicultural education and antiracism education as well as in postcolonial discourse has led to interesting attention drawn to the notion of "whiteness." Often viewed as neutral, but most often omitted in discussions of race, whiteness is a system for perpetuating dominance or hegemony. Whiteness cannot be ignored; as Ruth Frankenberg explains, "any system of differentiation shapes those on whom it bestows privilege as well as those it oppresses. White people are "raced," just as men are "gendered."[96] This recognition and self-examination, although fraught with difficulties, has led to significant changes in educational practice and approach to pedagogical issues.[97]

In religious education curriculum development, specifically Karen Cross's article entitled "Analysis of LiFE Curriculum for White Cultural Bias," a discussion of this normalization of whiteness and its reinforcement of dominance takes place. Her research examines LiFE Curriculum, which "was developed by the Christian Reformed Church in North America in cooperation with the Reformed Church in America and is produced by CRC publications in Grand Rapids for Sunday morning use from preschool through sixth

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[95] Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Post Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin (New York, Routledge, 1995), 26.
[96] Ruth Frankenberg , *White Women, Race Matters – The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 1.
[97] Alice McIntyre, "Exploring Whiteness and Multicultural Education with Prospective Teachers," *Curriculum Inquiry* 32 no. 1 (2002): 31.

grade."[98] For Cross, the issue of "whiteness" and its intersection with other oppressions is an important conversation that must be expanded into the broader context of religious education.

Spirituality of Children

Spirituality of children is another topic that has recently come to the forefront in educational research; consequently these findings have implications for curriculum development. There is a spiritual essence that all humans share. It is a craving deep within for transcendence and meaning.[99] Educator Christopher Meehan supports this commonality in stating that "Official documents dealing with spiritual development, point out that the spiritual is the essence of what is meant by being human; it is universal in that it is capable of being found and developed in all human persons."[100] In spite of its universality, the term "spirituality" is ambiguous and difficult to define. According to Meehan, research indicates that educators "interpret the word 'spiritual' in both religious and secular ways, depending on their own experiences." In the secular context,

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[98] Cross, "*Analysis of LiFE Curriculum for White Cultural Bias*," 244.

99 See Donald Ratcliff, ed. *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Spirituality and Applications* (Eugene Or: Cascade/Wipf & Stock, 2004).

[100] Christopher Meehan, "Resolving the Confusion in the Spiritual Development Debate" *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 7, no.3 (2002), 293. Meehan refers his readers to the following documents and writers; National Curriculum Council (1993) *Spiritual and Moral Development – A Discussion Paper* (London, HMSO); Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority (1997) *Education for Adult Life: The Spiritual and Moral Development of Young People*, Discussion Papers: 6 (London: SSCA Publications); Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (1997) *The Promotion of Pupil's Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development,* Draft Guidance for Pilot Work (London: QCA Publications); David Hay (1998a) Why Should We Care about Children's Spirituality?, *Pastoral Care in Education*, 16 (1) 11-16 and A.R. Rodger (1996) Human Spirituality: Towards an Educational Rationale, in R. Best (Ed.) *Education, Spirituality and the Whole Child*, (London, Cassell).

spirituality "seeks to find meaning and purpose in universal human experience rather than religious experiences."[101]

Within the context of religious education research, there have been many recent developments in regard to children and spirituality. The past twenty years have witnessed a significant shift in understanding. Between the 1960s and the 1980s, educational research was dominated by the work of developmental researchers such as Piaget (cognitive development), Kohlberg (moral development), Erikson (psychosocial development), and Fowler (faith development). Appealing to these theories of development and particularly to "Piaget's findings on cognitive development, some religious educators concluded that children are not ready to understand God and faith because they are not capable of abstract thought, which is not expected to develop until adolescence."[102] This theoretical perspective was reflected in religious education curriculum and approaches.

Because of the monumental impact of the developmental theorists, religious education lost sight of the co-existent research to support the evidence of profound spiritual experiences in early childhood. Recognition of the presence of spiritual experiences in childhood is demonstrated in the religious education work of both Sofia Cavalletti and Ana-Maria Rizutto.[103] Both Cavaletti and Rizutto designed programs that allow children to explore and express their own understandings of spirituality without prescribing responses and "correct" answers. Interestingly this research also impacted

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[101] Christopher Meehan, "Resolving the Confusion in the Spiritual Development Debate," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 7, no.3, (2002), 292.

[102] Catherine Stonehouse. *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 127. Stonehouse explains that Ronald Goldman is one such religious educator who has influenced may others. For an understanding of his research and conclusions see *Religious Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964).

[103] Ibid., 127. Stonehouse directs readers to consider the writing of Sofia Cavaletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child* and Ana-Maria Rizutto: *The Birth of the Living God: A Psychoanalytic Study*.

areas of education outside of religious education. Sofia Cavalletti's celebrated book "The Religious Potential of the Child" was influential in the development of the Montessori approach to education.

In the 1990s, with the work of Robert Coles and the publication of his widely acclaimed research with children, "The Spiritual Lives of Children," thinking about children's spiritual development began to change. Researchers began to question the idea that children's religious and spiritual cognition and understanding unfolds in a simplistic stage-like fashion. Research indicated that, although developmentalists offered an important dimension to our knowledge of religious or spiritual thinking, they offered little to explain children's spiritual experiences. This paradigm shift sparked a plethora of informative research in the area of children's spirituality.

Drawing on the foundational work of researchers such as Sophia Cavaletti and Robert Coles, Christian Religious Educators have recently written and contributed new findings in the area of spirituality and children. Some of these educators include Donald Ratcliff, Catherine Stonehouse, Sonja Stewart and Jerome Berryman. Jerome Berryman's book titled "Godly Play" brings to light a number of important issues. His approach to religious education "is an effort to give room and permission for existential questions to arise…It is a way to discover our deep identity as Godly creatures – created in the image of God".[104] Berryman also suggests spiritual experiences are fundamental in the lives of children and he suggests that "spirituality" could in fact be considered an intelligence (adding to Gardner's multiple intelligences).[105]

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[104] Jerome Berryman, *Godly Play: An Imaginative Approach to Religious Education* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 137.
[105] Ibid., 137.

Since his original work "Frames of the Mind" in 1983, when Howard Gardner introduced his seven multiple intelligences, he has been researching and considering additional intelligences. The original seven are: verbal linguistic, logical mathematical, bodily kinesthetic, spatial, musical, interpersonal and intrapersonal. In his 1999 follow up to the original work, Gardner introduces "naturalist intelligence" which has been widely accepted. In the book, "Intelligence Reframed. Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century," Gardner introduced "naturalistic intelligence" as well as other potential intelligences – existential and moral. Gardner explains his choice of the title existential as opposed to spiritual intelligence.

> It seems more responsible to carve out that area of spirituality closest 'in spirit' to the other intelligences and then in the sympathetic manner applied to the naturalist intelligence, ascertain how this candidate intelligence fares. In doing so, I think it is best to put aside the term spiritual, with its manifest and problematic connotations and to speak instead of an intelligence that explores the nature of existence in its multifarious guises. Thus an explicit concern with spiritual or religious matters would be one variety – often the most important variety of existential intelligences.[106]

Research is clearly indicating the importance of spirituality in both religious and secular contexts.

Consequently, it can be concluded that a comprehensive, integrated understanding of spiritual formation must be seen in religious education practice as well as in theory and research. Mary Peterson examines how this concern is being dealt with in New Zealand Presbyterian churches, who are responding to children's spirituality with a variety of models of ministry. According to Peterson's findings, New Zealand Christian Religious educators may not always understand what they are doing is spiritual development but it is happening. However, spiritual development needs to happen responsibly with a sense

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106 Howard Gardner, *Intelligence Reframed. Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 59.

of responsibility.[107] There is a need within religious education for intentionality. Spiritual formation during childhood is too important to simply perpetuate programs and hope for the best.[108] Thus, a thoughtful assembly of questions regarding approach to spirituality and children and how this theory is translated into practice in a curriculum document becomes an important aspect of any approach to evaluation. In curriculum development, there must be an effort to understand how faith forms and what experiences children need on their spiritual journey.[109]

Summary

This literature review covers a wide variety of interrelated subjects that are crucial in today's approach to education. I believe these concepts can be used in the context of religious education. Weis and Fine recognize this potential: "Increasingly, we see exciting possibilities for educators engaging with institutions that extend beyond the traditional sites toward for example, community centers, churches, and other kinds of public spaces and spheres." [110] My intention was that this research would utilize these concepts to enlarge and broaden our perspectives and self-understanding as we seek the best practices in the sphere outside of the school system as well as inside. Author bell hooks eloquently describes this intention: "Expanding beyond boundaries, it has made it possible for me to imagine and enact pedagogical practices that engage directly both the concern for interrogating biases in curricula that reinscribe systems of domination (such

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[107] Mary Peterson, "Responsibility for Spiritual Development: What are the Churches Doing?" *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 8, no 1 (2003), 73.
108 Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey*, 11.
109 Ibid., 12.
[110] Dimitriadis and McCarthy, *Reading and Teaching the Postcolonial: From Baldwin to Basquiat and Beyond*, 115.

as racism and sexism) while simultaneously providing new ways to teach diverse groups of students."[111]

[111] bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 10.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Within Christian Religious Education, it seems there is no current, consistent, rigorous approach to curriculum evaluation. At least I have not seen what I would define as rigor in my search. Although many practitioners are concerned with this area, a thorough methodology remains elusive. Most Christian religious education curricula are accompanied by some form of evaluation resources; major publishers of commercially available material usually include a generic evaluation document available to users. Some examples of such evaluations include Cook Communications Ministries, Group Publishing and Regular Baptist Press. The purpose of these evaluation documents is largely to help the consumer make decisions about what material is appropriate for their grade level context. These guides do not appear to be designed to address recent trends in research pertaining to curriculum and pedagogy.

Overall, within Christian religious education discourse pertaining to curriculua evaluation, an academic examination of material is dated and rare; therefore, no suitable, timely methodology for evaluation is available. Consequently, there is not an established tool that can be used for this kind of evaluation. It was therefore necessary to establish a unique methodology and approach to create an appropriate tool for curriculum evaluation within Christian Religious Education. For the purpose of this dissertation an appropriate methodology was developed based on an amalgamation of recent research, available evaluation materials and use of commercially available curriculum evaluation documents. "By taking seriously the unique ways in which religious educators ask and answer

questions about curriculum and evaluation we can make an important contribution to the wider debate."[112]

The method(s) employed in this research consisted of the following process: 1) establishing an evaluation tool, 2) selection of curriculum, 3) testing the tool using specific curriculum, 4) modifications to the pre-existing evaluation tool. Throughout the research process, I kept a learning journal to serve as a means to record daily experiences and evolving insights. According to Sandra Kerka, "the journal holds experiences as a puzzle frame hold its pieces. The writer begins to recognize the pieces that fit together and like the detective, sees the pieces evolve."[113] Because there is no clearly established approach to create an evaluation tool for Christian Religious Education curriculum, this process ran parallel to the conversation in the dissertation and was enhanced by my own learning and reflection as I attempted to thoughtfully employ the process.

John W. Creswell has concisely defined the term qualitative research in his book entitled *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*:

> Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of information and conducts the study in a natural setting.[114]

According to this definition, the most suitable methodology for this doctoral investigation was a research design that was qualitative in nature. Within the field of education, qualitative methodologies in research are varied and common. Qualitative educational

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[112] Mary Hess, "Curriculum and Evaluation in Religious Education," *Religious Education* (Spring 2000), 118.
[113] Sandra Kerka. *Journal Writing as an Adult Learning Tool*. Eric Educational Resources Information Center, 1996.
[114] John W. Creswell. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1998), 15.

research consists of many approaches some examples of which include narrative inquiry, phenomenology, action research and case studies in education.

The use of qualitative approaches is also seen specifically in religious education, and is frequently utilized independently or in conjunction with quantitative research methods. Clear, eclectic and interesting examples of this can be readily found in the journals *Religious Education* and *British Journal of Religious Education.*

For the purpose of this dissertation, an examination of literature/research regarding curriculum evaluation in general made it clear that evaluation is an established, legitimate area of qualitative research. "Evaluation of particular programs or policies is viewed as contributing to the literature of specific fields." In this case, I trusted that an evaluation within Christian Religious Education curriculum will make significant input to the discipline as this discourse appears to be largely absent. [115]

Researcher A.V. Kelly further elucidates the notion of curriculum evaluation as research, explaining that curriculum evaluation and curriculum development ought to be integrated and indistinguishable and the two amalgamate to form research.[116] Curriculum is not developed in a vacuum and it must be considered from a variety of vantage points in order to be thorough. This "holistic view [of curriculum research] sees evaluation as part of a continuous program of research and development and recognizes that curriculum is a dynamic and continuously evolving entity."[117] With this insight in mind, curriculum evaluation becomes a crucial part of the process as opposed to an after thought. The telos of both evaluation and research in education is often improvement of practice; therefore,

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115 Marvin C. Alkin and Ernest R. House, "Evaluation of Programs" in *Encyclopedia of Educational Research* v.2.
116 Kelly, *The Curriculum: Theory and Practice*, 143.
117 Ibid., 144.

evaluation and research are important components of curriculum and often share common goals.[118]

Recognizing the aptness of qualitative educational research focusing purposely on curriculum evaluation, it follows that an examination of different types of curriculum evaluation is a logical approach to narrowing down a suitable methodology. George Posner's book *Analyzing the Curriculum* suggests a wide variety of typical methods to utilize in curriculum evaluation including "questionnaires, interviews with teachers, content analyses of curriculum materials, comparison of achievement test data for groups using different curricula, follow up interviews of course graduates, case studies of classrooms that are typical of those used in evaluations focused on curriculum decisions."[119] In all these instances, depending on the goal of the curriculum document, a set of suitable criteria would have to be established in order to ask the kind of provocative questions that would be an aide to evaluate that material. In many reputable curriculum evaluation documents, there is a fairly standard set of questions that can be asked of the material. For example, see the evaluation guide for curriculum as offered by the University of Alberta-Faculty of Education.[120]

Establishing an Evaluation Tool

To establish a tool, I looked at the following components and used portions of each in order to strive to achieve an evaluation that best included the latest resources and research available in Christian Religious Education. I have outlined this approach using a simple diagram that can be seen below.

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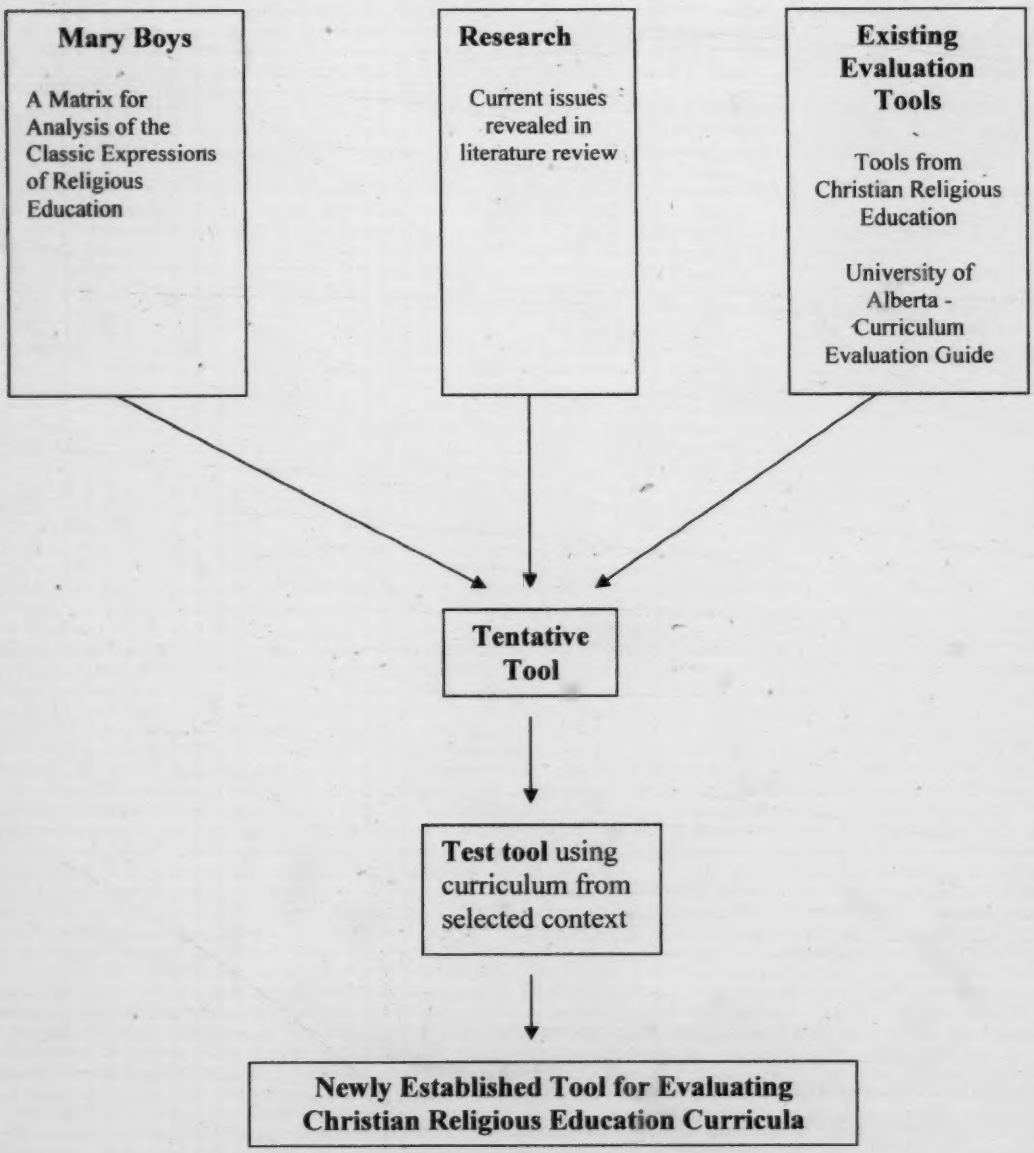
118 Ibid., 154.
119 Posner, *Analyzing the Curriculum*, 226.
[120] See www.library.uallberta.ca/subject/curriculum/evaluation/index.cfm

Figure 1: Diagram of Methodology for Establishing an Evaluation Tool for Christian Religious Education.


Mary Boys
A Matrix for Analysis of the Classic Expressions of Religious Education
Research
Current issues revealed in literature review
Existing Evaluation Tools
Tools from Christian Religious Education
University of Alberta - Curriculum Evaluation Guide
Tentative Tool
Test tool using curriculum from selected context
Newly Established Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula

Initially, I drew upon the work of a leading Christian religious education theorist, Mary C. Boys. Second, I included an integration of trends in educational research as outlined in the literature review. Third, and finally, I incorporated a portion of a variety of existing evaluation tools. Posner suggests that "the first step in analyzing your curriculum from an evaluation point of view is to try to identify any evaluation data (e.g. test scores), suggestions (e.g. questions) or instruments (e.g. scales) provided by the curriculum materials or in the research literature"[121] These three components were used to develop a comprehensive tool which will hopefully contribute to best practices in the discipline of Christian Religious Education. Upon reviewing the material it was clear that, within the area of curriculum evaluation, the type of evaluation that was appropriate in this case was evaluation that was formative in nature. As previously suggested, this approach is often used by curriculum developers because the ultimate goal is to lead to improvements and future development.

Speaking as an authority in the field of Christian religious education, Mary C. Boys, a well-known Christian religious educator, established a comprehensive framework for analyzing the field of religious education. In her book *Educating in Faith: Maps and Visions*, Boys recognized the blending of theology and education that forms the discipline and develops a series of "foundational questions" that explore the nature of this relationship. Although these questions were applied broadly to religious education, I used these questions specifically to examine curriculum documents in Christian religious

121 Ibid., 227.

education. Application and modification of Boys' systematic approach also contributed to the methodology used for this dissertation.[122]

The selection of Mary C. Boys' matrix for analysis of curriculum documents offered an approach which is consistent with existing Christian religious education dialogue. This distinctive application was crucial to a thorough assessment of curriculum because it allows for examination of theological issues as well as educational issues. Boys divides her "foundational questions" into two categories: i) What does it mean to be religious? (Theology); and ii) What does it mean to educate? (Education). In the first category, which I have called theology, Boys offers an inclusive list of questions to examine the field of religious education: a) Revelation: How is God revealed? Significance of worship? b) Conversion: What constitutes the experience of conversion? Role of Psychology? c) Faith and Belief: What is faith? How important is assent to creed? d) Theology: Significance in Religious education? e) Faith and Culture: How does faith situate the person in the world?

In the second category, which I have called education, Boys highlights the following questions: a) Goal of Education: Why educate in faith? What constitutes an educated person? b) Knowledge: What does it mean to know? What is the relationship between knowing and doing? c) Social Sciences: How formative a role should social sciences play? Which ones are influential? d) Curriculum and Teaching: What does the curriculum look like? How is teaching understood? e) Education as a Political Term: Toward what view of society is one educating?

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[122] James Plueddeman utilizes a similar methodology for curriculum evaluation in "Dilemmas of an Evangelical Curriculum Educator," *Religious Education* 79:1 (Winter 1984), 122-134. He modifies questions in a model established by William K. Frankena as a tool to analyze curriculum theory.

Examining Boys' matrix, it became evident that Christian religious education as a discipline is by nature very broad and can cover a wide variety of denominations and theological perspectives. As previously mentioned, my focus was on curriculum, particularly educational components of curriculum as opposed to the theological aspects that are interwoven in Christian religious education material. Although the two cannot be seen as discreet components, Boys' framework provided a helpful way to narrow the focus of developing a tool for curriculum investigation to either theological or pedagogical issues. Developing a curriculum analysis tool that includes an examination of theology would understandably lead to a complicated discussion of religious issues and perspectives, which would reach outside of the scope and intention of this dissertation. Consequently, I delimited my use of Mary Boys' matrix to the second part of her framework "What does it mean to Educate in Faith?"

Table 1: A Matrix for Analysis of the Classic Expressions of Religious Education.[123]

The Foundational Questions	**The Classic Expressions**			
What does it mean to be religious?	Evangelism	Religious Education	Christian Education	Catholic Education
REVELATION How is God revealed? Significance of worship?				
CONVERSION What constitutes the experience of conversion? Role of psychology				
FAITH & BELIEF What is Faith? How important is assent to creed				

[123] Mary C. Boys, Educating *in Faith.* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989)

Table 1 continued

THEOLOGY Significance in Religious Education?				
FAITH & CULTURE How does faith situate the person in the world?				
What Does it Mean to Educate in Faith?				
GOAL OF EDUCATION Why educate in faith? What constitutes an educated person?				
KNOWLEDGE What does it mean to know? What is the relationship between knowing & doing?				
SOCIAL SCIENCES How formative a role should social sciences play? Which ones are influential?				
CURRICULUM & TEACHING What does the curriculum look like? How is teaching understood?				
EDUCATION AS A POLITICAL TERM Toward what view of society is one educating?				

The next layer that should be added to the conversation in order to establish a pertinent and useful evaluation tool is the relevant issues in educational research which came to light in the literature review. One of the major issues arising from the literature review was related to ongoing research in the area of multicultural education. This has

been a significant movement in education for many years and it has started to affect the area of Christian religious education. I am proposing that any relevant evaluation tool must address some of the issues that arise as a result of this discussion. Another important area which came to light in the literature review was the spirituality of children and recent changes in our approach to this area. These questions cannot be ignored and must be included so that we are drawing on the most recent work in the education and building and improving of Christian religious education theory and practice.

The final layer required to build a potentially useful tool is the preexisting evaluation documents that are currently being used in the area of evaluation. These documents provided a series of potential questions that are commonly asked in evaluations within the discipline of education and Christian religious education, thus providing a supplemental and comprehensive approach to evaluating. It was important to note the varied goals of these documents as their purpose contributed to their applicability. Posner notes, "if you can find any data, suggestions or instruments specifically associated with the curriculum, try to determine the purposes that evaluation information is intended to serve. Is it supposed to provide information for decisions about the curriculum and if so are the decisions supposed to serve a formative or summative role?"[124] The nature or purpose of the pre-existing curriculum evaluation documents helped in the selection of appropriate questions that might be helpful in the newly established tool. "By engaging specific contexts with critical analysis and creative imagination, we might work into more just and faith-filled futures."[125]

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124 Posner, Analyzing the Curriculum, 227.
[125] Hess, "Curriculum and Evaluation in Religious Education," 117-118.

Analysis of Christian Religious Education Curriculum Evaluation Documents

As previously mentioned, many Christian Religious Education publishers include some form of evaluation document to help consumers make decisions about the appropriateness of the material for their specific context. A thorough examination of this material assisted in the establishment of a new tool for evaluating curriculum from a pedagogical vantage point. The evaluations that were highlighted are general tools developed by the publisher for use in comparing materials and making selection decisions. They were not designed with a more specific theological or pedagogical goal in mind. It is interesting to note that the material is used and retailed in the Canadian market but is developed by American companies. These publishing companies are among the many that are typically selected by Canadian Baptist Churches in Atlantic Canada. It is also important to note that, while all of the selected publishing companies label themselves as Christian, there are distinct differences in theological understanding/interpretation which are reflected in their doctrinal statements.

Regular Baptist Press

Regular Baptist Press is a publishing company that is located in Schaumburg, Illinois. The material is marketed to Atlantic Canadian Baptist Churches through local representatives and bookstores. When a church purchases this material, it is accompanied by the above document entitled "How to Evaluate Your Sunday School Curriculum." These thirteen questions are designed to help the purchaser make decisions about the appropriateness of the material for their local setting.

Table 2: Regular Baptist Press - How to Evaluate Your Sunday School Curriculum

1. What are the goals of your Sunday School program? How does your current curriculum help you meet those goals?
2. Does your current curriculum, provide Bible content appropriate for each age level? Do you follow the publisher's scope (content to be taught) and sequence (order in which material is to be presented), or do you pick and choose the courses you want to teach?
3. Do the lessons in your current curriculum provide foundational Bible teaching and are the lessons doctrinally sound? What is the publisher's doctrinal statement? Is the publisher charismatic? Compare your church's and the publisher's doctrinal statements.
4. How are subjects such as salvation, baptism and the Lord's Supper taught in your current curriculum? Is the plan of salvation presented throughout the teaching cycle?
5. Does your current material encourage older children, youth and adults in their personal Bible study and devotional time?
6. Can both new and experienced teachers successfully use your current curriculum?
7. Does your current material have adequate teaching resources? Are they visually appealing? Do they fit into the lesson?
8. Do the teachers feel that each lesson has appropriate depth in content? Would teachers label your current material as "fluff" or "light" when it comes to Bible content?
9. Is the lesson plan in your current material easy to follow, well organized and easy to implement? Do teaching methods encourage student participation and response? Are teachers able to hold the students' attention?
10. Would you say that the spiritual needs and spiritual growth objectives of your classes are being met? What have the students learned in the last year?
11. Are the student materials of your current curriculum appealing, varied and targeted to specific learning objectives each week? Do students and teachers find the materials attractive, inviting and user friendly?

Table 2 continued

12. Does the current curriculum fit well in the church's budget? Do you feel the materials provide good value for the money spent?
13. Does your church prefer a particular version of the Bible? What version does the current curriculum use?

The opening question in the survey is focused on the goals of the education process; "1. What are the goals of your Sunday School program? How does your current curriculum help you meet those goals?" This question is significant because it helps to determine the direction and ultimate objective of the program. Given that the aim of Christian Religious Education in general is for the most part theological in nature, many of the questions focus on theological aspects of the material. For example;

"3. Do the lessons in your current curriculum provide foundational Bible teaching and are the lessons doctrinally sound? What is the publisher's doctrinal statement? Is the publisher charismatic? Compare your church's and the publisher's doctrinal statements?

4. How are subjects such as salvation, baptism and the Lord's Supper taught in your current curriculum? Is the plan of salvation presented throughout the teaching cycle?...

13. Does your church prefer a particular version of the Bible? What version does the current curriculum use?"

Theological perspective is a crucial component in evaluating the material and is of paramount importance to a church that is selecting material. As a Christian religious educator, I would argue that, in order to offer the best possible material, we also need to seriously consider the pedagogical questions that are being asked within the evaluation

document. If we only consider the theological components we are neglecting an important component of the educational process.

The Regular Baptist Press evaluation document also includes a number of questions that focus on the teacher of the material for example;

"6. Can both new and experienced teachers successfully use your current curriculum? …

7. Does your current material have adequate teaching resources? Are they visually appealing? Do they fit the lesson? …

9. Is the lesson plan in your current material easy to follow, well organized and easy to implement? Do teaching methods encourage student participation and response? Are teachers able to hold the students' attention?

To focus on the pedagogical aspects of the material, questions of this nature can be included and address ideas about how teaching is understood. This pedagogical aspect is useful in establishing a new tool for evaluating Christian religious education material.

Another recurring question that is present in the majority of the evaluation documents that come from publishers, including the material from Regular Baptist Press is at least one question around the issue of church budget and cost of the material. As in secular education, financial considerations directly impact the education on a variety of levels including the relationships to curriculum decisions, development and implementation.

Interestingly, this evaluation also includes a question regarding spirituality; "Would you say that the spiritual needs and spiritual growth objectives of your classes are being met? What have students learned in the last year?" While this does not

specifically address the new research in children's spirituality, it does raise questions in that direction. The inclusion of general questions regarding spirituality at the very least may make an evaluator reconsider the kind of knowledge that he/she is seeking to impart to program participants.

Group Publishing

Group Publishing is another American publishing company that markets material in Canada. This publishing house is located in Loveland, Colorado. Group Publishing does not include a specific guide for curriculum evaluation with their material. In an email exchange with the organization regarding curriculum evaluation, I was directed to the "scope and sequence."[126] The scope and sequence delineates what will be covered in the curriculum during a specific time period. In Christian Religious Education, this typically indicates that a child in a Sunday School or education based program beginning at the introductory level will cover the entire content of the Bible over the next number of years of involvement. The primary concern in scope and sequence is regarding theology specifically dealing with Bible knowledge. While this is a helpful tool for parents, educators and church leaders, it does not address questions regarding evaluation of material. Scope and sequence does not focus on pedagogical issues such as approach to teaching. After further investigation, I discovered "Why Nobody Learns Much of Anything at Church: And How to Fix It" a book published by Group that is designed to evaluate churches' educational programs.[127] It offers a variety of suggestions for assessing material and programs. It also includes the following table specifically for curriculum evaluation.

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[126] Email exchange June 14-16, 2007.
[127] Thom and Joani Schultz. *Why Nobody Learns Much of Anything at Church: And How to Fix It.* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, Inc. 2004)

Table 3: Group Publishing - How Does Your Curriculum Rate?

Use these questions to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of your present curriculum. Take stock of teaching methods used. If your curriculum needs improvement ask what you can do to adapt or replace it.

1. What seems to be the overall goal of this material?	
___ learn historical facts	___ emphasize understanding of relevant life principles
___ learn Bible vocabulary	___ clearly apply Scripture to students' daily lives
2. What are the tacit objectives?	
___ teaching	___ learning
___ cover a lot of material	___ thorough understanding and retention
	___ help students think
	___ active, learning students
3. Which is most encouraged: lower or higher order thinking	
___ fill in the blank exercises	___ discovery learning
___ word games/puzzles	___ thought provoking activities
___ rote memorization	___ conceptual understanding
___ closed ended fact questions	___ open-ended thinking questions
4. How is the Bible approached?	
___ quotations to be memorized	___ practical truths to be understood
___ stories from history	___guidance for students' daily lives
___ glutton approach – the more Bible per lesson the better	___digestible approach – each lesson provides a nourishing morsel
___ emphasis on biblical detail	___emphasis on essential teachings
5. Is the methodology more passive or active?	
___ passive	___ active
___ emphasis on receiving information	___ emphasis on discovering the truth
___ sitting still	___ moving about
___ one or two senses involved	___ several senses involved
___ teachers lecture	___ students have conversations
___ students are the audience	___ students learn by doing
___ boring, tedious	___ fun and/or captivating
___ teachers tell	___ teachers ask
6. What are the structures of learning?	
___ individual or competitive	___ interactive – students work in pairs and small groups
___ students rely largely on the teacher	___students often rely on each other
___ teachers do all the teaching	___ students often teach each other
___ teacher based	___ student based.

Note. Responses in the left side (first group) indicate less effective learning approaches. Responses on the right side (second group) indicate curricular approaches that result in more genuine learning.[128]

The overall structure of this evaluation document is quite interesting. Users are to check off appropriate answers in relation to the material that they are examining. However, they are set up in a manner that is rather leading. The "incorrect" responses are gathered in one grouping and the "correct" answers are placed together in a second grouping. This may have a direct influence on the manner in which an evaluator chooses to respond to each question.

The evaluation questions begin with a question regarding the general purpose of the Christian Religious Education material; "1. What seems to be the overall goal of this material? Learn historical facts, learn Biblical vocabulary, emphasize understanding of relevant life principles or clearly apply Scripture to students' daily lives."

Unlike other evaluations, the emphasis is not on the theological aspects of the curriculum. The questions in this particular evaluation document are heavily education focused. According to Schultz and Schultz, the authors of *Why Nobody Learns Much of Anything at Church: And How to Fix It*, there is a desire within the Group organization to move away from older teaching methods and focus on new approaches. They include questions regarding objectives, higher and lower-order thinking, teacher-directed or student-directed learning, approaches to learning. Their thinking has been influenced by educators such as Howard Gardner and his theories of multiple intelligences as well as by

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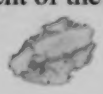
128 Permission to photocopy this survey granted for local church use. Copyright Thom and Joani Schultz. Published in *Why Nobody Learns Much of Anything at Church: And How to Fix It* by Group Publishing, Inc., P.O. Box 481, Loveland, CO 80539. www.grouppublishing.com

the work of Alfie Kohn.[129] It will be important to include some of these questions in a tool for evaluation.

Gospel Light

Gospel Light is a publishing company that develops Christian Religious Education Curricula. They are also an American company located in Ventura, California. Like most of the publishing companies, they have a well-developed and readily-accessible statement of faith, but their philosophy of education is a bit more challenging to find.

Table 4: Gospel Light – Curriculum Evaluation

Bible Content and Usage 1. Is the curriculum designed to teach the Bible as God's inspired and authoritative Word? Is there balanced coverage of the Old and New Testament? 2. Does the overall plan of the curriculum point students to faith in Christ as Savior and Lord and also nurture and guide them to "grow up in Christ"? 3. Does the material present Bible truths in a manner appropriate to the age level abilities and development of the student? 4. Is hands-on Bible usage and skill development encouraged at the appropriate age levels?
Student 1. Is the vocabulary appropriate for the age and abilities of the students? 2. Does the curriculum provide a variety of ways for students to participate actively in the learning process? 3. Are the student materials attractive and do they encourage involvement? 4. Do the teacher resources provide a variety of attractive aids to keep students' interest? 5. Are the Bible-Learning Activities appropriate to the physical, social, mental and spiritual development of the learner? 

[129] In "*Why Nobody Learns Much of Anything at Church: And How to Fix It,*" the authors cite the following; Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, Second Anniversary Edition. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2000); Howard, Gardner, *The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach*; Alfie Kohn, *No Contest: The Case Against Competition* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992) and Alfie Kohn, *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise and Other Bribes.* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999.)

Table 4 continued

Teacher 1. Does the curriculum challenge the teacher to prepare spiritually for the task of teaching? 2. Is the material clearly arranged to show the teacher an understandable and logical lesson plan? 3. Are the Bible-learning and life-response aims specifically and clearly stated for each lesson? 4. Does the material provide the teacher with a variety of Bible learning Activities from which to choose? 5. Are the teacher resources and teachers' books reusable? 6. Are the materials clearly presented, enabling the teacher to be prepared with a reasonable amount of effort? 7. Are there enough ideas and suggestions to adapt the material for longer or shorter teaching/learning sessions? Larger or smaller groups? Limited facilities, equipment?
Beyond the Classroom 1. Does the material provide ideas for making and sustaining meaningful contact with the student and his/her family outside the classroom? 2. Does the take-home paper contain activities that assist the family in relating the student's learning to everyday life? 3. Does the curriculum speak to issues relevant to the student's everyday life? 4. Does the curriculum provide materials and suggestions for ways students may understand the responsibility and joy of sharing Christ? 5. Does the curriculum encourage outreach and church growth?

The evaluation document that Gospel Light provides with their curriculum documents is divided into four distinct categories; Bible Content and Usage, Student, Teacher, and Beyond the Classroom. Under Bible Content and Usage, the evaluation questions predictably have a theological perspective and additional theological questions are interspersed throughout the document. The student and teacher sections predominantly focus on the educational process, including questions such as;

> Is the vocabulary appropriate for the age and abilities of the students? Is the material clearly arranged to show the teacher an understandable and logical lesson plan? Are the teacher resources and teachers' books reusable? Are there enough

> ideas and suggestions to adapt the material for longer or shorter teaching/learning sessions? Larger or smaller groups? Limited facilities, equipment?

Questions of this nature are commonly found in Christian Religious Education evaluation documents and they highlight the mechanics of teaching.

The final portion of the evaluation examines connections between a student's home environment and her/his learning experience. This unique category emphasizes the importance of making the learning experience relevant to children's lives. It includes questions such as;

> Does the material provide ideas for making and sustaining meaningful contact with the student and his/her family outside the classroom? Does the take-home paper contain activities that assist the family in relating the student's learning to everyday life? Does the curriculum speak to issues relevant to the student's everyday life?

This aspect of education is often overlooked. It may be an aspect of evaluation that ought to be included in the established tool. A child's outside experiences and daily life has a significant impact on her/his leaning in a more formal educational setting.

David C. Cook Communications

David C. Cook Communications is a publishing company located in the mid-western United States. This organization publishes a variety of Christian Religious Education curricula geared at different demographics and different denominations. This company markets to Canadian churches and is commonly selected by churches in the Atlantic Baptist Convention. Theologically, the organization provides a fair amount of diversity. David C. Cook provides an evaluation guide with their curriculum that allows the purchaser to compare their material with others. This document is easy to access both as part of any curriculum package and on-line.

Table 5: David C. Cook - Pick the Right Curriculum for Your Students

Focus on the Bible Criteria 1. Provides a faithful, thorough record of Scripture, including its foundational truths. 2. Encourages a personal faith in Jesus as Savior and age-appropriate Christian discipleship. 3. Covers Bible content appropriate for each age level, including Bible memorization and Bible study skills. 4. Is compatible with what our church teaches. 5. (Add your own criteria here.) 6. (Add your own criteria here.)
Focus on the Teacher's Guide Criteria 1. Learning objectives meet the developmental (spiritual, mental, physical, emotional) needs of the age level. 2. Lesson plan is easy to follow, well organized and easy to implement. 3. Lessons regularly encourage students to participate in age-appropriate action responses. 4. Lessons account for differences in learning styles and age-level abilities of students. 5. (Add your own criteria here.) 6. (Add your own criteria here.)
Focus on the Student Criteria 1. Lessons demand student involvement by using visual, auditory and kinesthetic methods. 2. Every activity helps move the student closer to the lesson objective. 3. Student materials are appealing, varied and targeted to what the student will learn each week. 4. Student scan effectively participate in these lessons in the physical space available for your program. 5. (Add your own criteria here.) 6. (Add your own criteria here.)
Focus on the Teacher Criteria 1. Both new and experienced teachers will be successful using this curriculum. 2. Options within the lessons help the teachers to customize the lesson to the specific needs and abilities of students. 3. Teaching aids are plentiful, appealing and well integrated into the lesson. 4. Teachers are given opportunities to grow both in their teaching skills and their own Christ-centered discipleship. 5. (Add your own criteria here.)

Table 5 continued

Focus on Parents Criteria 1. Each lesson provides ways for the Christian parent to be involved during the week in the child's discipleship development.
Focus on Quality and Price Criteria 1. Students and teachers find materials attractive, inviting, and user-friendly. 2. Paper and printing are of high quality 3. The materials fit into our budget and provide good value for the dollar: • Teacher's manual • Teaching aids • Student materials • Take-home materials 4. (Add your own criteria here.) 5. (Add your own criteria here.) 6. (Add your own criteria here.)
Focus on Your Own Criteria.

The evaluation guide provided above is similar to the documents produced by other companies. David C. Cook divides its evaluation into focus categories; Bible, Teacher's Guide, Students, Teachers, Parents, Quality and Price as well as an additional section in which the evaluator can add his/her own grouping. Acknowledging that theological perspective and understanding is a crucial part of Christian Religious Education curricula, the first portion of the evaluation looks at use of Biblical content. The remainder of the evaluation guide looks at issues around pedagogy. The section called "Focus on the Teacher's Guide" examines the structure of the provided lesson plans, evaluating their suitability for the developmental age-group, learning styles, student participation and usability. The second section scrutinizes the role of the student in the educational process; is the material student or teacher-directed in its approach? In

Christian Religious Education, the teachers using material are volunteers and may or may not have teaching experience. In light of this many of the curriculum evaluations, documents are concerned with the suitability of the material for teachers who do not have professional training. The material must be user-friendly, regardless of past experience, and easy to follow and implement. Interestingly, this portion of the David C. Cook evaluation guide also includes this following criterion; "Teachers are given opportunities to grow in both their teaching skills and their own Christ centered discipleship." While this statement contains a theological component, it is one of the few Christian Religious Education evaluation documents that suggests teacher training or development opportunities as an important part of dealing with the material. The evaluation document contains a question about parental involvement in education. The document contains a great deal of space for the evaluator to develop his/her own criteria for evaluation, providing questions under each focus. This added space creates an open-ended survey which can be tailored to fit particular situations or contexts.

Analysis of Christian Religious Education Curriculum Evaluation Guides Designed for Specific Contexts.

Christian Religious Education Curriculum Evaluation documents have been designed to meet specific situations. In an increasingly diverse, global world, churches and other religious organizations are finding that their constituencies are reflecting this diversity of culture, ethnicity and language. For this reason, some leaders are seeking to find and/or develop curriculum materials that echo this new reality. An extensive review

of literature revealed two evaluation documents designed explicitly to address sensitivity to culture and race in Christian Religious Education curriculum documents.

LiFE Curriculum

The first review was published as part of an article in Religious Education. This evaluation analyzed a specific curriculum called "LiFE Curriculum" used in the Reformed denominational milieu. The author Karen Cross set out questions that she felt would assist an evaluator in the process of determining white cultural bias.[130]

Table 6: Analysis of LiFE Curriculum for White Cultural Bias

1. Ensure scriptural integrity by limiting the unnecessary cultural overlay of biblical stories.
2. Eliminate associations of wealth and status as God's blessing.
3. Screen illustrations for accurate representation of skin tones and racial/ethnic identity.
4. Uplift the integrity and positive contributions of biblical women.
5. Provide a balanced presentation of stories and illustrations among urban, suburban and rural settings and where appropriate, celebrate the positive characteristics of the urban context today.
6. Include cross cultural and global stories that promote respect, understanding and good will.
7. Enrich the social action component to include discussions and activities for peacemaking and reconciliation particularly in older elementary levels.
8. Remove unhealthy stereotypes of age, class, gender and physical capabilities.
9. Provide healthy role models inclusive of persons with physical challenges.
10. Develop teacher helps and workshops and resources on multicultural diversity that impact our teaching ministry.

[130] Cross, "*Analysis of LiFE Curriculum for White Cultural Bias*," 240.

Note. It must be underscored that multicultural diversity is much more than a list of standard components or one analysis alone. The predisposition of a writer is far more important than correct grammar and case. Thoughtful, rigorous training and sensitivity must be engaged at every level of design and production-editors, readers, illustrators, resources specialists, pilot churches and workshop consultants – along with a heavy reliance on persons whose culture and faith experience stand outside the White, middle class, suburban culture.

Karen Cross' article in Religious Education is one of the few published examinations of Christian religious education curriculum in relation to issues of racial diversity. Her listed questions for evaluation are brief in number but dense in terms of content. She does not distinguish between theological concerns and pedagogical issues; the two are blended. Her article contains a detailed analysis of many of the topics found in the condensed questions that she had established.

The first criterion that Cross suggests when examining curriculum deals with interpretation of scripture. While this criterion is distinctly theological, the nature of the question highlights the importance of being aware of cultural overlay; reading one's own cultural perspective into understanding the material. It is inevitable that educators bring our own backgrounds and history to our work; obviously, we are all innately bound by our cultures. However, the impact of our cultural understandings is something that educators must be aware of when dealing with curriculum.

Another significant issue that arises when looking at issues of diversity is then notion of "class." Cross challenges evaluators to look at the understanding of wealth/poverty that is presented in the material. Again, this challenge is couched in theological language, but it does raise significant pedagogical issues. Cross also expands this concept by including a question around representation of urban, suburban and rural

communities, hoping to have curriculum content that presents these areas in a positive light.

The evaluation questions clearly examine Christian religious education curriculum to determine if the documents are perpetuating stereotypes regarding race, class, gender, age and physical capabilities. The issue of perpetuating stereotypes arises and must be eliminated in the content, representations, resources and illustrations. Social action and global perspectives are included as criteria because they foster an ability to see the world from multiple angles and thereby develop a greater appreciation for the diversity of people who may be impacted by the curricular material. This evaluation is both comprehensive and helpful and will add richness and depth to curriculum evaluation in Christian Religious Education. In the end, it formed an important part of a newly established tool.

Evaluating Curriculum for Sensitivity to Culture.

Arlene Wallace Gordon, a leader in the Presbyterian Church, recognized the lack of sensitivity regarding cultural diversity in her denomination and developed a tool for evaluation of curriculum as part of a Doctor of Ministry degree. This tool is contained in her unpublished dissertation entitled *Toward true multiculturalism: An Afrocentric critique of the Presbyterian Church* (United States of America) Christian Education Curriculum (1998) United Theological Seminary. Arlene Wallace Gordon's work in the area of curriculum development and evaluation was used for the purpose of her degree

and within the Presbyterian denomination, but the work was never published and no additional research was conducted in the years that followed.[131]

Table 7: Evaluating Curriculum for Sensitivity to Culture.

Evaluation document:

This instrument can be used by ministers, teachers and other education leaders to evaluate curriculum. It is a working document and may be used by any group to evaluate curriculum for sensitivity to culture. The user is expected to adapt, refine or expand any portion of this instrument that embodies a cultural bias to any particular group. The impetus to develop this instrument grew out of a work experience in the Congregational Ministries Division of the PC (USA) in which the curriculum of the denomination was examined for cultural inclusiveness as well as dominance of Eurocentric cultural perspectives. The instrument can also be used to evaluate videos and print resources.

1. Is the information presented culturally sensitive?
Some considerations are:

- Language – Words may have different meanings according to where and how they are used in the native language. Many ethnic groups use more than one language depending on the tribal identity and dialect of the group. Also significant is their link to a particular geographic area.
- Color – Skin color should not hint at racial and cultural labels. A dark color should not portray a negative image but be affirmed as a gift from God.
- Content – Major learnings should reflect God as God of all people. Therefore, the liberation of all persons as being created as equal should be reflected as appropriate stories are told. One's theology should be respected from a cultural perspective in order that troubling questions and challenges can be validated as appropriate? Teachings of the Christian faith should also be respectful for the cultural perspective. Beliefs and feelings should not be viewed with suspicion but open to dialogue. Discussions about one's spirituality should be a time for sharing and learning. Theological reflection should initiate discussion and not be obscured by cultural bias.
- Stereotypes – Avoid qualifiers that reinforce racial stereotypes. Stereotypes representing negative images should be avoided at all times.
- Contributions to Society – Journeys of faith should be shared from accurate accounts of the history, journals of a people and stories of the lived experience. Such information should include names, places or events that have contributed to

[131] Arlene Wallace Gordon is now a significant leader in the Presbyterian Church in Florida. She has not done any follow up work with on the issue of curriculum evaluation since the completion of her D. Min. This information was ascertained through an email conversation in February 2007.

their faith journey.

- Name Calling – Use of names, words and phrases that are perceived as offensive by a particular group of people should be avoided.

2. Is the information accurate from a geographical and historical perspective?
Some considerations are:

- Biblical Reference – Biblical references should be accurate in geographical location and hermeneutics as it related to race, class and kinship. Care should be given to avoid racially biased teachings to the detriment of any group.

- Biblical Perspective – Oppressive situations should not be linked to a particular group nor should one group feel superior to the other because of class or blood line. Social justice and charity should take seriously the biblical concern for justice.

3. Is it psychologically appropriate?
Some considerations are:

- Self Image – Pedagogy should encourage love of self first and foremost. Affirmation as unique creation should be used to dispel self-doubt and rejection.
- Health and Wholeness – Keep abreast of concerns related to approval and acceptance of ones presence in the company of another culture group.
- My Story – Affirm stories as a traditional method of teaching and learning.
- Trust – Be understanding when trust does not come easily.
- Death & Dying – Be sensitive to issues and concerns around death and dying. Pay particular attention to the issues around funeral ceremonies and burial procedures.

4. Is it theologically sound and/or appropriate?
Some considerations are:

- Spirituality – No group has a monopoly on spirituality. Be open to discussion and the meaning and hope expressed by each culture's traditions and values.
- Faith – Be careful not to miss one's faith journey as opportunity to learn and to teach.
- Music – Criticizing the music choices of any group is inappropriate as the choice of music varies within the cultures. Be open to a variety of music that emerges from all cultures.
- Worship experience – Consider everyone's worship experience as valid. Avoid cultural blindness in the worship experience. Avoid assumptions and expectations that everyone else should fit in and adapt.

Table 7 continued

5. Is it influence and/or power persuasion positive?
Some considerations are:

- Put Downs – Terms such as welfare mentality, racial minority, culturally deprived and marginalized are examples that may be perceived as put downs. Avoid jokes, riddles and humorous stories that are offensive.
- Identity – Foster positive images of groups of people being careful to dispel misconceptions, prejudices and adverse feelings. Avoid assumptions, criticisms and stereotyping about groups and issues such as street gangs, school dropout, migrant workers, persons considered living in poverty, homelessness, prisoners, pregnant teenagers, diseases, character, hostility, laziness, irresponsibility, self centered motives, violence and hopelessness.
- Empowerment – Affirmations should be ever present. Never feel that another affirmation is too many. Attest always that persons are created equal regardless of their socio-economic conditions or political status.
- Self-affirmation – Remember that notion that all persons are persons of worth and affirm the individual accordingly.
- Classism and wealth – Avoid use of words that denote superiority of one person over another. Examples may include words such a second class citizen, wealthy, middle class, poor, and disadvantaged.
- Racism and poverty – Be cognizant of your own tendency to be racist. Avoid racist remarks and gestures. Don't assume that anyone lives in poverty.
- Sexism and ageism – Avoid statements that signify gender or age bias. What is unacceptable to one group may be appropriate language for another group. Respect an individual's right if they do not measure up to your expectations.
- Roles – Understanding and interpretation of roles may differ for men, women and children depending on cultural upbringing. Don't make assumptions, ask questions. Images and messages are often misinterpreted.
- Justice – Always have respect for cultural values and traditions. Be careful to consider the possibility that you could be guilty of cultural imposition. Dealing with justice issues should encourage fairness and equal treatment for all involved.

6. Is it appealing to the eye?
Some considerations are:

- Presentation – Intangible aspects of culture may include vocabulary, mannerisms, behaviors and characteristics. Artistic presentations should always examine these things for appropriateness of use.
- Attractiveness – When considering attractiveness in presentation, consider what is perceived as attractive to whom.
- Visual response – The viewer should be able to respond to visual presentations without feelings of discrimination, injustice or cultural violation.

Table 7 continued

- Artistic Expression - Use of cartoons and other art should be discreet and culturally sensitive.

7. From what or whose perspective is it written?
Some considerations are:

- Identity – Consider one's ultimate worth as one created in the image of God. Features and characteristics of any group should not be exploited.
- Attire – Avoid judgmental statement regarding fashion trend or styles.
- Conflict – Recognize differences in dealing with conflict among various groups. Some examples may include: setting boundaries, decision making, participating in dialogue, saving face and confrontation.

Despite the lack of further research, Wallace Gordon's detailed questions offer an extensive examination of curriculum. Wallace Gordon calls for an evaluation of curriculum for cultural sensitivity in language, illustrations, content, stereotypes, name calling/labeling and the roles of particular people groups in society. This focus on cultural sensitivity is followed by a category that deals with the psychological appropriateness of the material for the audience focusing on issues such as self-image, health and wholeness, personal stories, trust and tradition in relation to death and dying. While these questions and categories make occasional distinctions between theology and pedagogy, many of the questions and categories have a more integrated approach.

The most interesting category that is included in Wallace Gordon's evaluation is question five; "Is it influence and/or power persuasion positive?" Issues around power are common in educational discourse particularly in relation to multicultural and anti-racism education, but this focus is not a common occurrence in the area of Christian Religious Education. The author encourages the curriculum evaluator to look at possible "put-downs," to examine issue of identity and empowerment. She also looks at curricular

presentation of issues of classism and wealth, racism and poverty, sexism and ageism as well as roles and justice. These criteria are reflected in the literature review and are pertinent additions to a comprehensive evaluation tool.

Analysis of Education Curriculum Evaluation Documents

There are a wide variety of evaluation documents available in the area of education. Similar to Christian Religious Education, some are provided with curriculum documents. Providing a variety of documents is common with provincial curriculum material across Canada. For example, evaluation materials accompany the New Brunswick Social Studies Curriculum as part of a foundational document designed to supplement the material at all grade levels.[132] While these documents, vary according to the purpose of the evaluation they contain many common criteria for evaluation. I have chosen to look specifically at a curriculum evaluation document that is used by the University of Alberta and is available online through the Herbert T. Coutts Education library. This evaluation contains many general questions that could be applied to the evaluation of most curriculum documents.

Table 8: University of Alberta - Curriculum Evaluation - U of A Faculty of Education

www.library.uallberta.ca/subject/curriculum/evaluation/index.cfm

Evaluation is judging the intrinsic merits of materials, according to William A. Katz in Collection Development: the Selection of Materials for Libraries, page 89. (Z 689 K18 1980 EDUC) Several points may be examined when the "intrinsic merits" of curriculum (K-Grade 12) materials are evaluated. The points listed below may be considered for both print and audiovisual materials. Of course, not all materials can be judged as excellent or even good in all respects. However, a strong critical evaluation which should include

[132] See www.gnb.ca/0000/publications/curric/social.pdf

both strengths and weaknesses of the material can be developed. A judgment can be reached concerning the overall quality of the material and its suitability for use in the curriculum.

1) *Authority*: What are the credentials of the author, editor, contributor, illustrator, actor, publisher or producer? This influences the credibility of the work. Dust jackets, introductions, and teachers' guides may contain some information. Biographical dictionaries and encyclopedias can also be useful to find information about prominent authors.
2) *Scope*: What subject or topic is covered? What is the depth of coverage? Is this a comprehensive work or an overview of a topic? The title, dust jacket, introduction, container and teachers' guides should provide some information.
3) *Audience*: Is this a juvenile, popular, scholarly or technical publication? Some material is recommended for a particular age or grade level. Are the print size, vocabulary, illustrations, and concepts appropriate for the recommended audience? Note that some materials may be of interest to both juvenile and adult level audiences.
4) *Curriculum support*: Does the material support the Alberta curriculum for the recommended audience level? Examine the Teacher Resource Manuals and Curriculum Guides published by Alberta Learning. Consult the manual or guide for the subject area of interest at the appropriate grade level.
5) *Objectivity*: Is a balanced view of a controversial topic presented? Has the author stated his/her personal bias about the topic in an introduction? Are opinions presented as facts or supported by research?
6) *Accuracy*: Is the information presented accurate, or are inconsistencies or inaccuracies noted? Check data against a known reputable source.
7 *Currency*: How current are references cited in bibliographies or lists of suggested readings? Is the latest census or statistical information included?

Table 8 continued

8) *Arrangement*: Does the information flow in an orderly fashion? Are there gaps or omissions in the information? Are indexes, glossaries, or keys to pronunciation available? Are test questions or suggested activities included? Are teachers' guides, workbooks, scripts or other support materials available?
9) *Style*: Is the information clearly presented in a style appropriate for the intended audience? Is the style scholarly or entertaining? Is it appropriate for the subject? Will students find the information not only interesting but intellectually challenging? Will students be stimulated to read more books by a particular author or to study further in the subject area?
10) *Physical format*: Is the binding or container durable and attractive? Check the typeface and illustrations. Are they clear, legible, and appropriate for the intended audience? Are audiovisual materials constructed of strong, durable material? Curriculum level materials are intended for use by many students. Is this the best format for presenting the information? What viewing equipment is required for audiovisual materials?
11) *Price*: Information may be available on the item or in catalogues or reviews. Is the price reasonable for the material? Take into account its intrinsic merits and physical qualities. If the material is available in more than one format, is there a notable difference in the prices? How does the price compare to other materials of a similar quality?
12) *Comparison*: How does the material being evaluated compare to materials by the same author, illustrator or publisher? Does it compare favorably to other materials on the same topic?

I selected this evaluation tool because it is offered by the education library at the University of Alberta. Although the document does not focus on the pedagogical value of the curriculum material, it can also be argued that the document contains questions that are generally applicable to most kinds of curriculum evaluation. Portions of this outline were used in the new tool.

Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula

Based on the matrix established by Mary C. Boys, an extensive literature review and an analysis of curriculum evaluation documents, the following tool for evaluating Christian Religious Education curricula was developed. The remainder of this dissertation contains the step-by-step testing and systematic reshaping of this tool as it was tested using curriculum materials to determine its viability and usefulness in Christian Religious Education Discourse.

CHAPTER 4

BUILDING A TOOL FOR EVALUATING CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM DOCUMENTS

Having reviewed selected evaluation documents, in this chapter I focus on building a tentative tool for evaluating Christian Religious Education curriculua I first offer a rationale for the structure of the tool as well as for the questions that are included in the tool. Second, I discuss questions that have been omitted from the tool. It is my hope that this process will offer insight for the evaluator and elucidate the important pedagogical issues that may be highlighted and problematized in the process of curriculua evaluation.

In previous chapters, I have given a rationale for the sections of the instrument I will build. To review, Mary C. Boys' work mapping and explaining trends in Religious Education offers an insightful template for use in creating a tool specifically for curriculum evaluation. She patterned her "matrix" after the work of Christian Religious educator Harold Burgess' "An Invitation to Religious Education,"[133] explaining that he "provides readers with a way of making their way through the maze of disparate ideas by means of analytical categories."[134] Consequently, for the purpose of creating a thorough tool, I have chosen to rely on the five main categories espoused by Boys in her "Matrix for Analyzing Religious Education." She offers these foundational questions as "the telescope…through which to survey the territory,"[135] 1) Goal of Education, 2)

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[133] Harold Burgess is a Christian Educator who focused his career on challenging the Church to consider "both the practice of teaching and the theoretical basis upon which the practice is built." See www.talbot.edu/ce20/educators/view.cfm?n=haroldburgess His seminal work is contained in his book entitled Invitation to Religious Education. Harold W Burgess. *An Invitation to Religious Education.* Mishawaka, IN: Religious Education Press, 1975.

[134] Boys, *Educating in Faith*, 4.

[135] Ibid., 5.

Knowledge, 3) Social Sciences, 4) Curriculum & Teaching and 5) Education as a Political Term. In a broad manner, these categories serve as a framework through which to develop a thorough evaluation tool.

Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula

I. Goal of Education
II. Knowledge
III. Social Sciences
IV. Curriculum and Teaching
V. Education as Political

Section One: Goal of Education

In the section of the evaluation tool entitled "Goal of Education," as in each section, I have included introductory questions that allow the evaluator to focus on the main ideas related to the topic. These questions come directly from Mary C. Boys' material. In the first section the questions are as follows; "Why educate in faith? And "What constitutes an educated person?" While an evaluator does not need to respond directly to these questions, the questions are included for the purpose of creating a focal point for the given section. In this case, "Why educate in faith?" draws attention to the goal or purpose for the Christian Religious Education program that is being offered while the second question looks at the expected outcomes or impact on the student. Attention to these focusing questions is crucial because the overall goals of Christian Religious Education programs are often overlooked.

These italicized introductory questions are followed by the actual evaluation questions. The evaluation questions focus on the overall goal of education - in this case the pedagogical purpose or objectives of the curriculum. Most of the examined evaluation documents contain references to the overall purpose of the curriculum. Within Christian Religious Education curriculum, the goal is quite frequently theological in nature. The educator using the material is expected to teach the material in such a way that it has a specific, indicated theological outcome for a participating student. When examining a curriculum document, it is essential for the evaluator to be aware of the overall theological goal. Once this goal has been established, the examiner can begin to study the material to determine whether or not the approach used is congruent from both a theological and pedagogical perspective. Does it make sense, or are there obvious conflicts? It would be in error to believe that, especially in religious education, pedagogy is not a crucial part of the content. How one teaches reveals what one believes theologically. For example, it simply would not be acceptable to adhere to heavy-handed discipline while encouraging students to experience the love of God or to have a completely teacher-centered lesson that speaks about the depth of relationship between God and humans.

Potential Questions

Acknowledging the presence of theological goals, the examiner may then ask: "Is the pedagogical approach reasonable?" I have included the following questions to explore the goals of any given program:

1) What is the overall goal of the program?

2) Does the written curriculum help you [both teachers and students] achieve that goal?

3) Identify the theological and pedagogical goals of the material. Are they implied or explicitly stated?

4) Is the approach to learning consistent with these goals?

At this point it is not my intention to enter into a discussion regarding an overall theological goal expressed in the curriculum. Recognizing that Christian Religious Education material is designed with different theological purposes in mind, the questions I am choosing to include ask instead that the evaluator initially become aware of the overall goals and subsequently determine whether or not the given material will pedagogically allow a teacher to meet those goals. Knowing the ultimate purpose of the material, the evaluator is then asked to determine whether the approach to learning is consistent with the goals.

In some cases, there might be a disconnect between the overall theological purpose and the manner in which the curriculum material instructs the user to teach or encourages learners to interact with materials. For example, it is impossible to help teenagers build critical and constructive insights completely through lecture or sermonizing. Sadly, Christian religious education materials historically seem to be lacking in self-critical insight. In reference to the deficiency of evaluation in Christian Religious education, Leona English states, "Although evaluation is as essential to education as facilitation and planning it is frequently neglected because programs end, program planners move on to new projects and there is little interest in genuine educational improvement."[136]

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[136] Leona English. Evaluation in Christian Education. *Christian Education Journal* 6 no 1.(Spring 2002), 25.

Specifically, I have seen this in older material published by Charisma Life. In 1992, this American Pentecostal publishing company released a curriculum package called "The Power Tool Box." It was designed for use in Sunday School programs for children up to grade 6. The overall theological goal of the material is to "win children to Christ."[137] Throughout the different segments contained in the curriculum, children are taught aspects of the Christian life. Over one series of 10 lessons, the young students are introduced to the Ten Commandments. To become familiar with the concepts contained in commandments, curriculum developers employed numerous techniques such as memorization, application, activities for children with different learning styles, and music. The variety of approaches is commendable. Another methodology used is a narrative approach. Recognizing the powerful potential of story in children's lives, the creators included this as a vital part of each lesson. However, ironically the central characters in the stories are called the "Ten Commandment Commandos" and are dressed in military fatigues and have a militaristic theme.

For me, this representation of the Ten Commandment by Ten Commandos is extremely distressing on a number of levels. It raises serious theological questions around God, Christianity, war, fundamentalism etc. From a pedagogical perspective, it is equally distressing. Specifically, it raises questions around hidden curriculum and a possible conflict between theological intent and the approach to teaching. While this example is undoubtedly blatant and extreme; I use this curriculum to illustrate the purpose of the first

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English adds the following information to support her understanding of the lack of evaluation in Christian Education: "The lack of attention to evaluation in Christian Education has been noted by innumerable researchers. See, for example, Donald Ratcliff and Blake Neff. *The Complete Guide to Religious Education Volunteers* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1993), 207."

[137] "Win children to Christ" is a phrase used by a range of Christian denominations. While this is a common expression, it may have a variety of permutations and interpretations. Generally it is meant to express the idea that individuals are introduced to the Bible and to Jesus Christ and at some point are asked to initiate and develop a "personal relationship with Jesus."

portion of the curriculum evaluation tool. Questions in this segment are included to assist the evaluator/user to recognize the goals and then to determine whether or not the approach to teaching delineated in the curriculum documents is logical and makes sense. This is a crucial category in the evaluation tool since it critiques the nature of the curriculum document.

Draft of the Evaluation Instrument to this point:

Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula

I Goal of Education

*Why educate in faith?**
What constitutes an educated person?

a) What is the overall goal of the program? Does the written curriculum help you to achieve that goal?
b) Identify the theological and pedagogical goals of the material. Are they implied or explicitly stated?
c) Is the approach to learning consistent with these goals?

* italicized focusing questions taken directly from Mary C. Boys

Section Two: Knowledge

Following an examination of the overall goals and approaches used in curriculum, it is important to consider knowledge. Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that deals with the nature, origin and scope of knowledge. Understanding the multiplicity of philosophical definitions for knowledge, for the purposes of this evaluation tool knowledge is defined as follows; what is to be taught and why it is important. Because

the goals of Christian Religious Education are often theological as well as pedagogical, the kind of knowledge that the curriculum encourages must be understood. As a general guideline, Mary Boys asks the following questions, "How is knowing more than comprehending information? What is the role of ritual, story and symbol? Can one always articulate or measure what has been learned? What is the relationship between knowledge and know-how?"[138]

Potential Questions

As a way to explore these issues around knowledge, I have synthesized and included the following questions taken from the evaluation examples;

1) What kinds of objectives are established for each lesson?

2) Does the material foster critical thinking and engagement with material?

3) What is most encouraged: lower or higher level thinking?

4) Does the written curriculum encourage students to engage with material outside of the classroom environment?"

These questions help the evaluator determine the nature of the knowledge that any given curriculum is propagating. Initially, the evaluator is asked to systematically consider the objectives for a given lesson. These objectives will clearly delineate what kind of knowledge[139] is expected from students who complete the lesson. Are the students expected to recite factual information? Are they learning information that is

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[138] Boys, *Educating in Faith*, 7.

[139] For more comprehensive understanding of "kinds of knowledge" it may be helpful to refer to Bloom's Taxonomy - Bloom identified cognitive levels or levels of thinking from 'lower to higher' – Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, Evaluation.

directly applicable to their daily living? Do the objectives encourage a change in attitude or action as well as intake of information?

The next questions I have included in the evaluation tool further explore the nature of knowledge: Do the objectives foster critical thinking and engagement with material? What is most encouraged: lower or higher-level thinking? Because the nature of knowledge can be a complex philosophical issue, these questions allow a broader audience to begin to examine these issues. Higher level thinking involves critical thinking and engaging material in a manner that requires reflection and creative, open-ended responses. It requires 'metacognition' which researcher Ingrid Pramling notes "occurs when the child reflects on the content matter so that what the child thinks becomes the object of his or her own thinking."[140] Curriculum should be assessed to determine higher level of thinking is required by the students as opposed to activities that connect student insights or understanding in a more simplistic approach – such as the regurgitation of facts.

"Constructivism is variously described as a philosophy, an epistemology, a cognitive position or a pedagogical orientation…one of its basic premises is that all knowledge is constructed; knowledge is not the result of passive reception." [141] A constructivist approach to learning suggests that students comprehend new information by building on their previous knowledge. "Few scholars today would reject the notion that knowers actively construct their own knowledge."[142] Children do not enter the classroom as a blank slate; they have been learning from the time of their inception and come to each

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[140] Ingrid Pramling, "Developing Children's Thinking about their own Learning," *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 58 (1998), 267.
[141] Nel Noddings, *Philosophy of Education* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1995), 115.
[142] Ibid., 115.

learning "space" from a culture and with a great deal of personally constructed understandings. As a result, subsequently children acquire new knowledge based on what they already know.

Curricula designers that implicitly build upon such constructivist notions understand, also, that children construct knowledge both individually and socially. Hence, curricula are insufficient/inappropriate when the material engages students only in "fill-in-the-blank" course packs where students tend to only memorize facts chosen in a hierarchical manner and where an answer key trumps individual understandings. The weakness of "rote from a distance" can be seen at work in the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) curriculum, commonly used as a home-schooling tool or in private Christian schools. Using this material, each student works on his or her own and progresses at his or her own pace through a highly-structured education program. "The work consists of low-level cognitive tasks that emphasize simple association and recall activities, as is typical of instruction from workbooks."[143] Any notion of a team learning environment or the value of individual thought seems effectively eliminated. "Cooperative learning which invests some power in and attributes some wisdom to the group, is seen to undermine the relationship of subservience of children to adults and to God."[144] The "concrete" design of such a curriculum directly contradicts Vygotsky's notion of social constructivism, which is popular in educational theory. This independent rote learning minimizes opportunities for critical thinking and students are given no opportunity to question and challenge ideas presented in the material. The concreteness of such a curriculum also concomitantly works to instill an understanding within students of their status as lesser-

[143] David C. Berliner, "Educational Psychology Meets the Christian Right: Differing Views of Children, Schooling, Teaching and Learning." *Teachers College Record* 98, (1997), 381-416.
[144] Ibid., 381-416.

than and not capable of personally constructing knowledge on their own or as part of a group.

Understanding that a constructivist approach to learning and teaching is both prized and common in education today, the questions in this part of the evaluation are designed to touch on this element of education theory. They examine ideas around how we as educators understand knowledge and how the students deal with or take in new information to create knowledge. The final question in this segment of the evaluation tool is "Does the written curriculum encourage students to engage with material outside of the classroom?" This question focuses on the application of material but also strives to draw attention to the theory that students construct their understanding of new information by connecting it to information that they already know. Overall, this series of questions explores knowledge and pedagogical orientation in relation to understanding of knowledge.

Draft of the Evaluation Instrument to this point:

Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula

I Goal of Education

**Why educate in faith?*
What constitutes an educated person?

a) What is the overall goal of the program? Does the written curriculum help you to achieve that goal?
b) Identify the theological and pedagogical goals of the material. Are they implied or explicitly stated?
c) Is the approach to learning consistent with these goals?

II Knowledge

What does it mean to know?
What is the relationship between knowing and doing?

a) What kinds of objectives are established for each lesson?
b) Do they foster critical thinking and engagement with material?
c) What is most encouraged: lower or higher level thinking?
d) Does the written curriculum encourage students to engage with material outside of the classroom environment?

* italicized focusing questions taken directly from Mary C. Boys

Section Three: Social Sciences

Within religious education discourse, there is discussion regarding the role that social sciences play in the approach to learning and teaching in the discipline. In education, it is generally understood that theories from related disciplines (social sciences) will impact and influence the approach to curriculum and teaching. In religious education, the use of social sciences is often controversial and must be considered with an understanding of the use of theology. Religious Education theorists examine the theories from psychology, anthropology and sociology etc., and make decisions regarding whether or not social science theories are possible sources to inform thinking within the specialty of religious education.

Some religious educators rely solely on theological tenets when dealing with pedagogical approach, while others rely on some combination of theology and social sciences. In some cases, more conservative groups' use of social sciences is considered contradictory to the "Christian" message. This perspective is clearly outlined by David C.

Berliner in his address to the Educational Psychology Division of the American Psychological Association entitled, "Educational Psychology Meets the Christian Right: Differing Views of Children, Schooling, Teaching and Learning." Berliner explains that there are a significant number of Christians belonging to the "Christian Right," who reject any use of social science theories particularly educational psychology.[145] "In the rhetoric of religious fundamentalists these (teachings based on social science) 'evils' are bundled together as "secular humanism," a catch all phrase that refers to educational philosophies that are 'human-centered" rather than God-centered." The underlying philosophical questions that are fundamental to the use of social sciences in religious education are intricate, but they are important to recognize for pedagogical purposes. Although this debate is complex, practical questions included in the evaluation of curriculum will reveal the intentions and understandings of the curriculum designers in regards to the role of social sciences. Answers to questions regarding social sciences and theology will reveal the basic structure of the curriculum.

Potential Questions

This section consists of the following questions:

1) Is there a major emphasis on developmental stages – cognitive, physical, emotional and spiritual?
2) What theorists/theories are the authors using as a foundation for their material? Is this difficult to identify?
3) Do the writers use any education related materials to support their approach?

[145] Berliner's use of the term 'Christian Right'

4) How does the written material encompass research findings in children's spirituality? Are students given opportunity to develop and articulate their own understandings?

Within the broad spectrum of approaches to religious education, many streams have chosen to integrate social sciences with their theological perspectives, thus creating unique pedagogical approaches. Other more fundamental groups choose to rely solely on theology, ignoring possible input from other disciplines. When constructing curriculum documents, many publishers/developers indicate their intentions in a clear manner. The first question in this section offers the evaluator a potential clue regarding use of social sciences; "Is there a major emphasis on developmental stages – cognitive, physical, emotional and spiritual?" For example, curriculum documents that address the cognitive, physical, emotional and spiritual stages of child development often rely on developmental psychological theories.

One of the most obvious ways that the role of social sciences can be seen is in the structure used in lesson planning. Does the material appear to be broken into "age-appropriate" segments or activities? If such divisions exist, it is a clear indication that the authors have created a resource that values a blend of theological information and developmental psychology. Although the use of age-levels is not a direct explanation of the position of the developer, it is a significant marker. An additional look at the statement of faith or the educational philosophy of the material will also provide an indication as to how the developers have chosen to blend theology and social sciences.

The second set of questions I have included in this section of the evaluation tool are; "What theorists/theories are the authors using as a foundation for their material? Is

this difficult to identify?" This provides valuable insight into the structure of the curriculum. In their book *Why Nobody Learns Much of Anything at Church: And How to Fix It*, Group Publishing refers to the work of educational theorists Howard Gardner and Alfie Kohn in developing their pedagogical approach to religious education. In most Christian Religious Education curriculum documents specific theorists are not mentioned, making it more difficult to get a clear sense of the background information creators are using to establish their programs. In some cases, theorists are not mentioned but the material is clearly built on educational theory.

For those who have lived as educators for the past decade, the use of Alfie Kohn as a theorist of note is curious. Kohn is an outspoken critic of the North American work place, traditional management systems and even commonly-accepted parenting techniques, and many aspects of public education. His citing here suggests a more-radical understanding of educating than one might typically expect from Christian-based curriculum materials. On the other hand, Kohn is noted to support compassion and altruism. He is also a peace advocate in human relationships, all of which "fit" the more classic Christian tradition.

The subsequent question "Do the writers use any education related materials to support their approach?" helps the evaluator ascertain information regarding use of education theory in the curriculum. As previously noted, this use of educational theories is seen in support material printed by Group Publishing. Group evaluation materials refer directly to theorists, but this is not mentioned in their curriculum documents. However, use of multiple intelligences, learning styles and noncompetitive activities as educational approaches allude to adherence to a specific use of educational theories.

The final question in this portion of the evaluation tool looks at the understanding of recent research regarding spirituality of children. Much of Christian religious education curriculum is structured according to developmental theories and has interpreted children's spirituality in a similar manner. Lesson plans are constructed in a manner that emphasizes developmental stages and decides the "spiritual" content that a child is able to digest and wrestle with at a particular age. While these stages offer valuable insights, developmental theory must be understood in context; there is a parallel and growing body of research that indicates that children have profound and meaningful spiritual experiences.[146] "The spiritual life of children is of rapidly developing interest in many western countries."[147]

The research of theorists David Hay and Rebecca Nye[148] regarding children's spirituality indicates that children have many spiritual experiences and they describe a number of different classifications for this "spiritual sensitivity," one of which is identified as mystery-sensing. "Mystery sensing pertains to the wonder and awe, the fascination and questioning that is characteristic of young children as they interact with the mystery of the universe."[149] Does the curriculum offer opportunities in which children can respond to a lesson or story with this sense of wonder?

In his book *Godly Play*, Jerome Berryman structures Christian religious education programs with space for "I wonder…" statements, allowing children to explore and

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[146] For examples of the research being done in Children's spirituality see David Hay, Rebecca Nye, Jerome Berryman, Sofia Cavaletti, Donald Ratcliff, Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May.
[147] Brendan Hyde, "Children's Spirituality and The Good Shepherd Experience, " *Religious Education* (Spring 2004), 137.
[148] See David Hay and Rebecca Nye. *The Spirit of the Child*, rev. ed. Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006
[149] Hyde, Children's Spirituality and "The Good Shepherd Experience, " 141.

develop their own understandings of the mysteries that they encounter.[150] Despite this growing concentration, curriculum developers often overlook this research and tend to favor developmental stages. Consequently, this question is important in curriculum evaluation because it examines the role of social sciences in relation to spirituality in religious education and ultimately indicates the structure of the curriculum.

Draft of the Evaluation Instrument to this point:

Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula

I. Goal of Education

**Why educate in faith?*
What constitutes an educated person?

a) What is the overall goal of the program? Does the written curriculum help you to achieve that goal?
b) Identify the theological and pedagogical goals of the material. Are they implied or explicitly stated?
c) Is the approach to learning consistent with these goals?

II Knowledge

What does it mean to know?
What is the relationship between knowing and doing?

a) What kinds of objectives are established for each lesson?
b) Do they foster critical thinking and engagement with material?
c) What is most encouraged: lower or higher level thinking?
d) Does the written curriculum encourage students to engage with material outside of the classroom environment?

III Social Sciences

How formative a role should social sciences play?
Which ones are influential?

a) Is there a major emphasis on developmental stages – cognitive, physical,

[150] Berryman, *Godly Play*, 60.

emotional, and spiritual?

b) What theorists/theories are the authors using as a foundation for their material? Is this difficult to identify?
c) Do the writers use any education related materials to support their approach?
d) How does the written material encompass research findings in children's spirituality? Are students given opportunity to develop and articulate their own understandings?

* italicized focusing questions taken directly from Mary C. Boys

Section Four: Curriculum and Teaching

This portion of the evaluation tool focuses on the curriculum documents and the approach to teaching and learning that is promoted within the curriculum. To this point, the evaluation tool has centered on the theory and philosophy that undergird the material. Having examined the background, this series of questions looks at the specific details of the curriculum itself.

Potential Questions

The first question, "What is the role of the teacher?" encourages the evaluator to examine the nature of teaching. By considereing the kinds of activities suggested and how the teacher is to present material, evaluators should gain a clearer sense of how the curriculum developers understand teaching. For example, "Are teachers transmitters of knowledge, do they actively engage students?" The corollary questions; "What is the role of the student in the learning process?" and "What approaches to teaching and learning are encouraged?" complement the exploration of the role of the teacher. Do the students participate? Are they encouraged to formulate their own understandings? Is learning understood as transmission of knowledge?

Existing Christian Religious Education curriculum evaluations focus predominantly on lesson plans. This focus on lesson plans is an important component of the curriculum documents and is worthy of detailed attention. Many questions in these Christian Religious Education curriculua evaluations look at the structure of the lesson plans but neglect to question the authority/objectivity of the lessons themselves. I have selected a variety of questions under the heading of authority/objectivity of written material: "Who was involved in developing the material? Is this difficult to determine? Examine developers' background qualifications. How did they influence the material? How do they handle controversial issues? Are biases obvious?" Before looking specifically at the lesson plans, it is necessary to be conscious of the perspectives of the writers and developers as this has a weighty impact on the nature of the material.

Lesson plans form the backbone of the written curriculum document and must be examined. This sequence of questions is an amalgamation of issues derived from available evaluation documents:

> Are they arranged in a manner that is easy to follow? Do they offer teaching resources for the classroom? Are the materials suited to the audience – illustrations, vocabulary, and content? Is the material relevant to the daily lives of the students? Are there a variety of activities/methods that might appeal to diverse learning styles, multiple intelligences and personal preferences? Are opportunities for development and/or background information provided to support the teacher?

This conglomeration of questions addresses a variety of issues about lesson plans. Most of these concerns were raised in pre-existing evaluation documents. "Are they [lesson plans] arranged in a manner that is easy to follow?" Evaluators are interested in how "user-friendly" the curriculum documents actually are. Christian religious education teachers are often volunteers and have self-admittedly little to no training in the area of

education. Consequently, it is important that lesson plans within curriculum can be used and understood with ease. "Do they [lesson plans] offer teaching resources for the classroom?" Again lack of professional training necessitates the presence of resources, which assist an inexperienced teacher as well as a veteran. Most evaluation tools fail to assess the availability of developmental material and/or background information to support teachers. In combination, these questions help to determine the ease with which a teacher will navigate the curriculum.

The remainder of the questions regarding lesson plans emphasize the appropriateness of the lesson plan for the students. "Are the materials suited to the audience – illustrations, vocabulary and content?" Most lesson plans are designed with a particular age group in mind and all components of the lesson are assembled in such a way that most students in that age group can comprehend and learn. "Is the material relevant to the daily lives of students?" This question probes the understanding that students must build on prior knowledge in order to construct new knowledge. For this reason, students must make some kind of connection to the material in order to learn. "Are there a variety of activities/methods that might appeal to diverse learning styles, multiple intelligences and personal preferences?" Drawing on the educational theory, this question examines the use of these theories in lesson construction. Overall, the goal is to determine whether or not the designed lesson plan will meet the needs and draw the attention of a given age group so that they can learn.

Draft of the Evaluation Instrument to this point:

Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula

I. Goal of Education

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What constitutes an educated person?

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d) Does the written curriculum encourage students to engage with material outside of the classroom environment?

III Social Sciences

How formative a role should social sciences play?
Which ones are influential?

a) Is there a major emphasis on developmental stages – cognitive, physical, emotional, and spiritual?
b) What theorists/theories are the authors' using as a foundation for their material? Is this difficult to identify?
c) Do the writers use any education related materials to support their approach?
d) How does the written material encompass research findings in children's spirituality? Are students given opportunity to develop and articulate their own understandings?

IV Curriculum and Teaching

What does the curriculum look like?
How is teaching understood?

a) What is the role of the teacher?

b) What is the role of the student in the learning process?
c) What approaches to teaching and learning are encouraged?

Examine the written material

d) Authority/Objectivity
i)Who was involved in developing the material?
ii) Is this difficult to determine?
iii)Are their background/qualifications identified?
iv) How did they influence the material?
v) How do they handle controversial issues?
vi) Are biases obvious?

e) Lesson plans
i) Are they arranged in a manner that is easy to follow?
ii) Do they offer teaching resources for the classroom?
iii) Are the materials suited to the audience – illustrations, vocabulary, and content?
iv) Are the materials relevant to the daily lives of the students?
v) Are there a variety of activities/methods that might appeal to diverse learning styles, multiple intelligences and personal preferences?
vi) Are opportunities for development and/or background information provided to support the teacher?

* italicized focusing questions taken directly from Mary C. Boys

Section Five: Education as Political

In this final component of the evaluation tool, inquiry focuses on the teleogical goals of the curriculum; as Mary Boys writes, "Toward what view of society is one educating?" The curriculum developers for Christian religious education have specific and normally stated objectives about what is to be learned through teaching of the curriculum. Simultaneously, developers and teachers have specific goals regarding the

kind of society they are hoping to influence or create. Most often these goals flow out of a theological perspective.

Potential Questions

Although the purpose of this tool is to examine curriculum from a pedagogical perspective, this question encourages the user/evaluator to be aware of the underlying theological goal for the recipients. The intent is not to question the validity of the theological goal but rather to be aware of it so that corresponding pedagogical approaches can be assessed. The link between underlying intent of the material and pedagogy is crucial. "Is this perspective [ultimate theological goal] consistent with the pedagogical approach used in the curriculum or is it conflicting?"

As noted in the literature review, "diversity" is a prevalent topic within educational discourse. Educators and theorists are researching issues of inclusion for all students regardless of race, class, gender etc. This development in educational research has led to major improvements in multicultural education and anti-racism education. The remaining questions in the evaluation tool look at material for sensitivity towards diversity. Through examination of the curriculum documents evaluators and users are also encouraged to acknowledge hidden and null curriculum. "Is the information presented culturally sensitive? Consider language, color, content, stereotypes, contributions to society, name calling, use of the Bible?" The detailed examination of material will allow the evaluator to appraise a wide variety of aspects of the curriculum that are often overlooked. "Is it influence and/or power persuasion positive? Consider the use of put downs, issues of identity and empowerment, understandings of wealth and poverty, racism, sexism, ageism, roles, justice and representation."

The Tentative Tool

After examining the literature and pre-existing evaluation questions, pedagogically relevant questions were selected to establish a potential tool for use in evaluating Christian Religious Education materials. This tentative tool will be tested using representative Christian Religious Education curriculua to determine the effectiveness of the tool. In preceding chapters, the results of this testing will be discussed and any required changes to the tool will be made.

Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula

I Goal of Education

*Why educate in faith?**
What constitutes an educated person?

a) What is the overall goal of the program? Does the written curriculum help you to achieve that goal?
b) Identify the theological and pedagogical goals of the material. Are they implied or explicitly stated?
c) Is the approach to learning consistent with these goals?

II Knowledge

What does it mean to know?
What is the relationship between knowing and doing?

a) What kinds of objectives are established for each lesson?
b) Do they foster critical thinking and engagement with material?
c) What is most encouraged: lower or higher level thinking?
d) Does the written curriculum encourage students to engage with material outside of the classroom environment?

III Social Sciences

How formative a role should social sciences play?
Which ones are influential?

a) Is there a major emphasis on developmental stages – cognitive, physical,

emotional, and spiritual?
b) What theorists/theories are the authors using as a foundation for their material? Is this difficult to identify?
c) Do the writers use any education related materials to support their approach?
d) How does the written material encompass research findings in children's spirituality? Are students given opportunity to develop and articulate their own understandings?

IV Curriculum and Teaching

What does the curriculum look like?
How is teaching understood?

a) What is the role of the teacher?
b) What is the role of the student in the learning process?
c) What approaches to teaching and learning are encouraged?

Examine the written material
d) Authority/Objectivity
i)Who was involved in developing the material?
ii) Is this difficult to determine?
iii)Are their background/qualifications identified?
iv) How did they influence the material?
v) How do they handle controversial issues?
vi) Are biases obvious?

e) Lesson plans
i) Are they arranged in a manner that is easy to follow?
ii) Do they offer teaching resources for the classroom?
iii) Are the materials suited to the audience – illustrations, vocabulary, and content?
iv) Are the materials relevant to the daily lives of the students?
v) Are there a variety of activities/methods that might appeal to diverse learning styles, multiple intelligences and personal preferences?
vi) Are opportunities for development and/or background information provided to support the teacher?

V Education as Political

Toward what view of society is one educating?

a) Is there a theological view of society that is encouraged through the curriculum?
b) Is this perspective consistent with the pedagogical approach used in the material or is it conflicting?
c) What does the material teach implicitly or explicitly regarding sensitivity to diversity in race, class, gender etc? Is the notion of inclusion part of the overall

vision for Christian Religious Education?

i) Is the information presented culturally sensitive? Consider language, color, content, stereotypes, contributions to society, name calling, use of the Bible?

ii) Is it influence and/or power persuasion positive? Consider use of put downs, issues of identity and empowerment, understandings of wealth and poverty, racism, sexism, ageism, roles, justice, representation.

*All italicized questions are taken from Mary C. Boys' "Matrix for Analysis of Religious Education."

Omitted Questions

In the creation of a new evaluation tool while many questions from pre-existing evaluations were included, many were also excluded. As noted, I have chosen not to include biblical/theological questions. I have delimited the focus of this dissertation to the pedagogical aspects of Christian religious education curriculum as opposed to the theological. Although the biblical/theological aspects are essential, the scope of the research would be too large.

Questions around quality and physical format of the materials were also excluded. I felt issues of appearance of materials are a secondary concern. Presentation can contribute to ease of use but my primary concern is with pedagogical issues. Many of the tools that I reviewed included questions around the cost of curriculum. Unfortunately, finances are a significant consideration and can be the most influential factor in most curriculum decision-making so this is an important issue. This question is a practical one, but I have chosen to leave it out in favor of a pedagogical focus.

Another issue included in a number of the pre-existing evaluation documents is parental involvement. Parents are important partners in education. Curriculum evaluators recognize this and include questions around the role of parents in the learning process. This is an interesting question particularly in a church context since Christian religious

education in the church environment is heavily reliant on parental participation and involvement. At the risk of appearing contradictory, I have opted to omit questions pertaining to parents. The role of the parent can be considered as a portion of the theological understanding that undergirds the approach to curriculum in general.

Physical space is a concern in education. Some of the evaluation documents contain questions about the space available for teaching. Because this question depends on the number of students present in any given class, the available facilities as well as resources, I have selected to omit it.

At first glance, it may appear that other questions from the pre-existing documents have been omitted. However, because the concepts are important to a thorough evaluation of these curricula, I have re-worded and combined the ideas in many of the questions to form new more concise questions for this evaluation tool. I have amalgamated questions by focusing on the theoretical ideas that the questions held in common and then combining questions with similar themes.

Summary

Overall, the purpose of this chapter was to build the tentative draft of the instrument I would like to utilize to evaluate Christian Religious Education Curriculum. In this chapter, I also undertook to offer an explanation for the questions that I have included and omitted in a tentative tool. The explanation provides some insight into the selection of appropriate questions and the reasoning used to select those questions. In the subsequent chapter, I will utilize Christian Religious Education curriculum materials to test the tool. I will evaluate the materials in order to determine the effectiveness of the tool and to make decisions regarding and potential changes to the tool.

CHAPTER 5

TESTING THE EVALUATION TOOL

Within the field of Christian Religious Education, curriculum evaluation has been largely overlooked. In the previous chapter, the first draft of an evaluation tool was established. This draft evaluation tool was an attempt to assess the pedagogical issues involved in Christian Religious Education curriculum based on pre-existing evaluation tools as well as emerging issues in educational research.

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss the results of testing the created tool. This testing was done to determine the overall effectiveness/usefulness of the tool. In this process, I examined issues such as "Are the evaluation questions satisfactory?" "Should some questions be added or omitted?" and ultimately "Is the tool thorough and effective?" Does it help evaluate what it was intended to evaluate? Appraisal of the tool was done through the practice of detailed assessing by use of commercially available Christian Religious Education curriculum.

Curriculum

I selected a curriculum titled "David C. Cook - Bible in Life" published by Cook Communications Ministries. This curriculum material is used widely by churches in my denomination and geographical area - the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches. (Choosing this curriculum allowed me to address issues within my own context.) I opted to use one curriculum package to test the tool so that I was looking at material with one specific theological perspective. Because theology within Christian Religious Education

is so varied, this choice limited the scope of the research. The choice made it easier to focus on the pertinent pedagogical issues. The David C. Cook curriculum material is representative of the pedagogical approach that is utilized in most Christian Religious Education material designed for the Sunday School environment; thus it made this curriculum a reasonable example in my decision to select one program to use as a test case.

The American publishing company Cook Communications Ministries[151] publishes a variety of curricula designed to meet specific needs in the broader church community: "Echoes," which is specifically for the African American Church; "Accent," which uses the King James Version of the Bible; "Reformation Press," which emphasizes the tenets of the Reformed tradition; "Wesley," which is doctrinally distinct for the Wesleyan church, and many others. These curricula are specifically tailored to suit different denominations, people groups and particular needs of a range of different church congregations.

The "David C. Cook – Bible in Life" material is promoted as "Biblically-based, easy to teach and prepare and engaging every learner."[152] It is published quarterly and can be ordered by different congregations to suit the timing of their programs. This curriculum package contains general information and is divided into age groups; toddler, preschool, early elementary, elementary, older elementary, middle school, high school and adult (bible study). Each level comes with a teacher's guide, student books, craft books (if appropriate) and "take home" papers. I selected material from the September to November 2006 quarterly publication of the Bible in Life curriculum as the curriculum

[151] Cook Communications Ministries – for detailed information regarding the many aspects of this company see www.DavidCCook.com

[152] See www. DavidCCook.com promotional information

material I used for my evaluation. I referred to this package of material in general terms as David C. Cook – Bible in Life but I drew my observations and analysis from the above mentioned quarter.

Procedure

To assess the "Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curriculum," I used the selected curriculum to work through each section of the tool; i) Goal of Education, ii) Knowledge, iii) Social Sciences, iv) Curriculum and Teaching and v) Education as Political. In the process, I described the curriculum and made observations regarding the appropriateness of the questions in the evaluation tool. This procedure resulted in observations regarding the curriculum as well as remarks impacting the tool itself.

Section One: Goal of Education

The first section of the "Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula" contains questions that focus on the overall pedagogical goal of the printed curriculum material.

Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula

I Goal of Education

*Why educate in faith?**
What constitutes an educated person?

a) What is the overall goal of the program? Does the written curriculum help you to achieve that goal?
b) Identify the theological and pedagogical goals of the material. Are they implied or explicitly stated?
c) Is the approach to learning consistent with these goals?

* italicized focusing questions taken directly from Mary C. Boys

Examining the Curriculum

The "David C. Cook - Bible in Life" curriculum includes preliminary material in a section called general information. This preface to the curriculum package offers teachers a brief overview of the lessons contained in the package, including an outline of activities for each age group, information for ordering materials and a "scope and sequence." Scope and sequence is a tool which is commonly included in Christian Religious Education curriculum. It indicates the range and order of content that will be covered in a given amount of time. "David C. Cook's" scope and sequence is marketed as covering the entire Bible every four years. In addition, the material contains a short summary of the structure of lessons and numerous advertisements.

Question: What is the overall goal of the program? Does the written curriculum help you to achieve that goal?

The initial question in the "Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula" focuses on the goal of the curriculum. In education curriculum, the overall vision/goal for the material is normally stated at the very beginning of the package.[153] The "David C. Cook - Bible in Life" introductory material contains the following excerpt;

> Sunday school teachers are happy and excited to be going to their classes! The reason for their enthusiasm is simple…they are using David C. Cook Bible in Life! Here is what is so special about Bible in Life. Our Bible-based lessons are sound, easy to teach and are designed to impact every student that is entrusted to your care – from ages 3 to 103! And as the name implies, Bible in Life helps each student put Bible truths to work where it counts – in their [sic] everyday life.

[153] See NB social studies curriculum www.gnb.ca

This statement is obviously promotional in nature, but it also reveals the overall purpose of the material; to have "each student put Bible truths to work…in their [sic] everyday life." This statement encapsulates the theological goal for the curriculum, and in Christian Religious Education it is commonly referred to as "life application." Life application normally refers to the process through which students encounter and learn biblical content and then apply it to their daily lives, thereby learning to live a "Christian life/lifestyle." This concept is a common theological goal for Sunday school programs.

Although the objective is unmistakably stated within the above quote, it is not referred to as the "goal" for the program; nor is it directly communicated as the end aspiration for the material. The teachers' guides at each level have the following title and caption; "David C. Cook: Deep Truth. Bold Faith. Changed Lives." Similar to the introductory material, the title for the teaching resources reminds instructors about the aim for the curriculum; but, similarly, it is not identified as the "goal" for the program. In short, the manner in which the overall goal for the program is presented is indirect, thus making it ineffective and easily overlooked by the individuals who are teaching. This lack of attention to a specific overall goal is a widespread problem in many Christian Education programs. Unfortunately, vague goals can lead to ineffective teaching, vague approaches and disjointed programs.

Following the general information, the David C. Cook – Bible in Life curriculum is divided into age-appropriate lesson packages containing detailed lesson plans. Each lesson is assembled according to a set formula which includes a "lesson focus." This simple statement reminds the teacher of the information that is important throughout the lesson. However, the overall goal of the program is not repeated within the lessons.

Teachers are aware of the content for any given lesson and it is obvious that life application is a crucial component of each lesson. Interestingly, the material does not make a written connection to the overall goal of the program; that relationship is implied. This pattern – the lack of specific connections between means and goals – is consistent at all age levels.

The first question in the "Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula" regarding the overall goal for the program is important. Having examined the "David C. Cook – Bible in Life" materials, it is clear from reading the curriculum materials carefully that the purpose of the curriculum is crucial. In this case, the theological goal (life application) is built into the structure of each lesson even though it is not directly stated in the lessons. The lesson plan structure is pedagogically significant because it demonstrates that the written curriculum does in fact help the instructor achieve the theological goal. Although the goal is a built-in component of the approach to learning, the evaluation question regarding the overall goal serves as a reminder to curriculum planners to keep this goal in the forefront so that it is constantly in the minds of the teachers who are using the materials. The issue of overall goal is significant and must be included in any Christian Religious Education curricula evaluation tool.

Question: Identify the theological and pedagogical goals of the material. Are they implied or explicitly stated?

As previously stated, Christian Religious Education curricula are often constructed with a main theological goal and a pedagogical goal or approach. Most curriculum designers in Christian Religious Education focus directly on the theological goal, seeing this focus on theology-in-action as the most important part to the program.

Consequently, pedagogy (which ironically is the first curriculum "action" that students see – whether or not they comprehend what is happening) is often overlooked. In the David C. Cook – Bible in Life material, the theological goal is the focal point and some aspects of the pedagogy are discussed. The pedagogical approach is most evident in the structure of the lesson plans. The lessons in each "David C. Cook-Bible in Life" lesson plan are based on a "Four-Step Learning Plan."

> Step 1: Motivate – The purpose of step one is to link your students' life experiences (home, friends, school etc.) to the Lesson Focus and to interest them in the topic. Step 2: Learn the Facts - The purpose of step two is to present the Bible information to your students. Step 3: Practice – The purpose of step three is to provide a variety of opportunities to practice the information they've just acquired. Step 4: Apply – The purpose of step four is to encourage your students to apply what they've learned to their everyday experiences.

This four-step plan is described in the curriculum as congruent with the way people learn and it is referred to as the "natural learning cycle." The above description of the lesson approach is simple and straightforward in manner so that any teacher, regardless of experience, can follow it. While the curriculum does not explicitly express the pedagogical approach from a theoretical perspective, it is implicitly communicated in The "Four-Step Learning Plan."

The phrase above "regardless of experience" is key to teaching in Christian education because, more often than not, Christian education teachers lack formal teaching experience. Ergo, it seems even more crucial that pedagogy and its specific intents – as well as the relationship between pedagogical activities and curricular goals – is made manifest in the written curriculum of any Christian education program. Because Christian teachers engage in such deeply personal work, we must accept that many – perhaps, most – of these teachers are earnest, yet ignorant, of formal educational practices and theories. Therefore, it seems ever more incumbent upon those who build Christian education

materials to be as clear as possible as to the natural and embedded relationships between theory and practice.

Question: Is the approach to learning consistent with these goals?

The "Four Step Learning Plan" approach is intended to allow teachers to use designated teaching methods to accomplish the theological goal. By introducing the material to students so that they can make personal connections and then offer students opportunities to practice what they have learned and respond outside of the classroom, the curriculum designers are hoping that students will accomplish the desired "life application" of the Biblical material. There seems to be a consistency between the theological objective and the approach to learning.

Discussion of Tool

Examination of the "David C. Cook – Bible in Life" curriculum allowed for analysis of the materials; but, more importantly, it led to an opportunity to reflect on the effectiveness of the "Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula." This procedure has clearly determined that there is a need for examination of the overall goal of the curriculum. In the David C. Cook material, the goal is stated but not in a direct manner. Perhaps it is a holdover from a belief that the "content" of Christian education is more important than the pedagogy; or, perhaps it is a lack of educational competence and confidence on the part of the Christian education teachers and/or Christian education curriculum designers. That said, no considerate reader of the life of Christ could help but observe the consistency between Christ's content and pedagogical actions. To overlook this consistency in present-day curricula would seem to be less than thoughtful.

I believe that teaching would be more effective and consistent if the teachers were often reminded of the overall goal within the context of every lesson that they teach. If they are not, because most have not been formally educated as teachers, in my experience they will default to teaching as "moving content knowledge from the book to the head." In itself, learning content is a necessary component. However, it does certainly not represent the fullness of the Christian life.

The consistent presence and awareness of the main goal would allow teachers to teach each week with a purpose in mind. The first question in this section is, "What is the overall goal of the program? Does the written curriculum help you to achieve that goal?" As stated, the focus on an overall goal is crucial; however, the second portion of the question appears to be redundant. The remaining questions in this section allow for the intent of the second portion of the question to be discussed and this portion of the question is therefore not necessary.

The second question is "Identify the theological and pedagogical goals of the material. Are they implied or explicitly stated?" Christian Religious Education curricula tends to be exceedingly direct in regard to the theological information that is communicated to students, and David C. Cook is no exception. Although not stated as a goal in each lesson, the theological intent is clear. The David C. Cook materials also provide teachers with a specific approach to teaching, which is a simplified expression of the pedagogical theory implied in the curriculum. Because theology and pedagogy are the essential components of curriculum this important question ought to remain part of the tool.

The question "Is the approach to learning consistent with these goals?" causes the evaluator to focus on the issue of consistency between theology and pedagogy. In the David C. Cook curriculum, it is clear that the curriculum designers purposely selected a pedagogical approach that works with the theological goal outlined in the material. For the purpose of the evaluation tool, this question is effective and should not be changed.

The evaluation tool was divided into sections according to the work of Mary Boys. The first section is called "Goal of Education" and includes two focusing questions "Why educate in faith?" and "What constitutes an educated person?" The outlined questions for this portion of the evaluation focus on the goal. The second question is largely overlooked and, in light of the theological goal (life application), is definitely an oversight. The tool should be reconsidered and include a question regarding the impact or "appearance" of the student who has completed the program. How does a student who has engaged in "life application" (of Biblical material) demonstrate this? The inclusion of a question of this nature will complete the section and would provide the teacher with a better sense of what they are trying to accomplish with the program.

Section Two: Knowledge

This portion of the Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curriculum is concerned with how "knowledge" is understood and taught in the lessons.

Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula

II Knowledge

What does it mean to know?
What is the relationship between knowing and doing?

a) What kinds of objectives are established for each lesson?
b) Do they foster critical thinking and engagement with material?
c) What is most encouraged: lower or higher level thinking?
d) Does the written curriculum encourage students to engage with material outside of the classroom environment?

Examining the Curriculum

Question: What kinds of objectives are established for each lesson?"

The first question is "What kinds of objectives are established for each lesson?" This query encourages the evaluator to assess the kind of expectations that lessons provide for the students. "Curriculum documents use a number of different terms to describe what students learn; some documents use the term objectives, others expectations, and still others outcomes. In each case, the outcome relates to something that students will be able to know or do."[154] In the "David C. Cook – Bible in Life" curriculum the lessons do not have anything labeled expectations, outcomes or objectives. However, at the beginning of each part of the lesson, a sentence is included which lays out what is expected of the students in each component of the lesson; this

[154] Wendy Frood Auger and Sharon J. Rich, *Curriculum Theory and Methods*. (Mississauga, ON: John Wiley & Sons Canada Ltd., 2007), 251.

sentence seems to be the equivalent to an "objective." Following David C. Cook's "Four Step Lesson Plan," each lesson is divided into sections; for example a high school lesson entitled God's Mercy is divided into four parts; 1) Connecting with God's Word, 2) Studying God's Word, 3) Interacting with God's Word, and 4) Applying God's Word.

Each of these sections has a sentence that describes the intended "objective" for that module of the lesson. Section one begins with the following description; "Describing evil: Your teens will draw upon their experiences in order to define evil." Section two states; "Limiting evil: Your teens will use the ID Bible study[155] about God's mercy and discuss how God sets limits while still being merciful." These outcome statements describe "what students will be able to know/do after the lesson is taught."[156]

Question: "Do they (the objectives) foster critical thinking and engagement with material?"

The second question regarding knowledge is "Do they (the objectives) foster critical thinking and engagement with material?" Critical thinking is defined as "Reflective application of skills involved in examining information, observation, behavior or event; analyzing an issue; forming and supporting an opinion; making a decision; or solving a problem."[157] Examining the lesson plans from a variety of age levels within the David C. Cook - Bible in Life curriculum leads to a general observation regarding "objectives;" most involve critical thinking and engagement with material but are not worded in a manner that reveals this on first glance. To analyze the wording of the objectives, I have selected to use Middle School material as an example. In a lesson

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[155] ID Bible Study material comes with the high school level curriculum in the David C. Cook – Bible in Life material and is intended to accompany the lessons.
[156] Frood Auger and Rich, *Curriculum Theory and Methods*, 154.
[157] (Wilen 1996, 138) as cited in Joseph M. Kirman, *Elementary Social Studies* (Toronto, ON: Pearson Education, 2007)

called "We Need Each Other," the focus of the lesson is "Our God made us for relationships" based on scripture in Genesis 2. The lesson is divided into the standard four parts, each with an "objective" statement prefacing the actual description of activities. Section one is titled "Connecting with God's Word" and includes the following 'objective;' "Students will discuss why their friendships are important to them." Section two is called "Studying God's Word" and the objective states; "Students will study the scriptural foundation of relationships from Genesis 2."

In lesson plans for educational curriculum, an effective learning outcome is constructed so that the "specified action by the learner is *observable*, the specified action by the learners is *measurable*, and the specified action is *done* by the learner."[158] To develop outcomes that fit this pattern, lesson plan writers often rely on verbs (concrete "action words.") One of the above-mentioned outcomes uses the phrase "students will discuss." This wording is general and would be difficult to measure. The value and quality of the discussion are not easily established; some students may not participate, others may not contribute meaningfully. The nature of the discussion is unclear based on the broad nature of the objective.

Christian Religious Education curriculum for the Sunday school setting does not require assessment so outcomes don't need to be a specific as they might in school-based educational context. However, instructors and program directors often want to know if they are making a difference or impact on the lives of their students. This approach to outcomes is not specific and, as a result, might or might not encourage critical thinking or engagement with the materials. When observing the actual activities and lessons that go

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[158] Unpublished material used by my colleague Stewart West at Atlantic Baptist University. For more information regarding assessment and outcomes see http://pareonline.net/Home.htm

with the outcomes, it is clear that the curriculum designers are striving to have students engage with the topic. Critical thinking may be more likely if the outcomes were intentionally constructed to allow for this.

Question: What is most encouraged lower or higher level thinking?

One way to determine whether or not higher-level thinking skills are being encouraged in curriculum is through examining the nature of the questions that are asked. Benjamin Bloom and developed cognitive levels and his research "highlighted how different types of questions that are asked, in turn influence the kind of thinking that is generated in children."[159] Bloom et al. offer a straightforward insight into the general "level" of the questions asked within a curriculum and certainly offers a rough assessment of the curriculum. There was a revision to Bloom et al. in 2001, The changes were made by a former student of Bloom named Lorin Anderson. Anderson's purpose was to add relevance for students and teachers. This resulted in a change in terminology; each of the six categories were changed from nouns to verbs.

> Remembering (previously knowledge) –retrieving, recognizing and recalling relevant knowledge from long term memory.
> Understanding (previously comprehension) – constructing meaning from oral, written and graphic messages through interpreting.
> Applying – able to apply an abstract idea in concrete situations, solve a problem and relate it to prior experiences.
> Analyzing– able to break down a concept into its component parts; able to identify relationships among components; sees cause and effect; sees similarities and differences.
> Evaluating (previously synthesis) – making judgments based on criteria and standards through checking and critiquing.
> Creating (previously evaluating) – putting elements together to form a coherent or functional whole; recognizing elements into a new pattern or structure through generating, planning or producing.

[159] Frood Auger and Rich, *Curriculum Theory and Methods*, 204.

Drawing on the revised Bloom's levels, commonly known as Bloom's Taxonomy, a general level of questions included in a curriculum document becomes apparent. In the David C. Cook – Bible in Life material, each lesson contains a selection of questions that teachers might use to encourage participation and learning for the students.

One of the middle school lessons in the curriculum package is called "Flooded by Faith,' which is based on Genesis 6:9-10; 7:1-5; 8:18-22. The lesson focuses on the notion that "God is faithful." The lesson begins with the standard first section; Connecting with God's Word. In this activity students are introduced to the subject matter and are asked to "plan a route between two points on their map, for example, from New York to Los Angeles or from one side of your state or city to the other." The teacher is to ask the following questions:

> 1) Were all the routes the same? *(No, probably not)*; 2) Did they all work? Did they get people to their destination? *(Yes, although some of them were longer than others, they all eventually got to the destination.)*; 3) How can these maps and the routes we choose be like life? *(We do not all take the same route through life – some of us hurry through, some wander around and see the sights, some take detours that lead away from our destination.)*

These questions represent the standard approach to questioning that is present throughout the curriculum. Many of the questions are "yes or no" questions and can thereby be considered "lower level" according to Bloom's taxonomy. The final question listed in this series is a higher-level question and offers students a possible opportunity to apply, analyze, evaluate and create.

The variation in questions presented in each lesson is positive; however, the recorded answers are reason for a bit of concern. Following each question in the material, an answer is provided. This feature is most likely intended to assist the teacher, particularly those with limited experience. Unfortunately, should the teacher "accept" the

answer "key" as either close-ended or normative, the presence of specific answers may well inhibit students' ability to be creative and offer an unscripted response to the material. This lack of open-endedness is cause for concern regarding the structure of the lessons and may actually discourage higher-level thinking. My statement is not meant to castigate curriculum designers because, as noted before, working with teachers who are not formally trained can be difficult. It is especially tough to know how prescriptive to be, because the range of teaching background is so varied from situation to situation.

The creators of the David C. Cook – Bible in Life curriculum *do* want students to engage in higher-order thinking and they comment directly on the issue of thinking within the explanation of the Four Step lesson plan structure. Step three of the plan provides the students with an opportunity to practice what they have learned. The instructions state; "Practice time – a time to turn the classroom into a laboratory. You'll correct misunderstandings and challenge children to think a little deeper." Rather than simply encouraging rote learning or memorization, in this step students participate in a variety of activities so that they can process the material for themselves and hopefully think at a higher level.

Question: Does the written curriculum encourage students to engage with material outside of the classroom environment?

The overall pedagogical goal of the David C. Cook –Bible in Life curriculum is "life application;" to have students "put Bible truths to work where it counts – in everyday life." As previously mentioned, the lesson plans are structured (The Four-Step lesson) with this idea of life application in mind. Consequently, the curriculum designers have regularly included concepts, items and material from the students' lives at home, school and outside of the religious education context.

In the early elementary curriculum lesson; "Jesus knows me," the introductory activity (step 1) connects the students' experiences to the concept being taught. Students are given an activity sheet that has pictures of six different items; carrots, camping, cats, pizza, books and soccer. Students are instructed to mingle with each other and determine which items their classmates like. The purpose of this exercise is to get to know each other, and is later compared to the theme "Jesus knows me." This practical and interactive activity and the subsequent discussion are directly connected with items that are assumed to be familiar to most children in this age group thus allowing the children to engage with outside of the classroom environment. At the conclusion of the lesson, in the fourth step, students are encouraged to talk about how they are going to use the lesson information in their daily lives this week. Students are also given "take-homes;" these are papers designed to help students relate to the material when they go home, making a conscious effort to provide students with opportunities to connect materials with their daily lives.

Discussion of Tool

The first question in this knowledge portion of the tool requires the evaluator to examine objectives; "What kinds of objectives are established for each lesson?" Having used the Christian religious education curriculum documents (David C. Cook – Bible in Life) to test the tool, it became apparent that this question is too vague and should be adapted. Based on the use of objectives in the examined material, the presence of objectives should be established; therefore, a possible variation could be; "Are specific objectives listed in each lesson?" This more direct question will help the evaluator to determine the nature of the objectives. Are there objectives at all? If yes, are they

specific? Where are they found? Are they accompanying each lesson or are they located only in an introduction?

In addition to the new question regarding objectives, a supplementary question may be considered; "Are the objectives written so that teachers can determine whether or not students can meet the requirements of the objective?" This question is designed to assist in assessing the nature and wording of the objectives. Compared to the single question regarding the kinds of objectives in the lessons, these adapted questions allow for a more detailed and thorough examination of the outcomes found in the curriculum.

The question: "Do they (the objectives) foster critical thinking and engagement with material?" appears to be a useful question for analysis. This question offers an opportunity for the evaluator to look at objectives in relation to the type of activities and the learning that is taking place in each lesson. A vague outcome makes it difficult to assess whether or not learning has occurred, whereas an outcome that is specific can help a teacher to determine that his/her students are accomplishing the desired tasks.

As a corollary to the evaluation question regarding critical thinking and engagement in objectives, the question "What is most encouraged: lower or higher level thinking?" examines the kind of thinking that is present in the designated activities in the lessons. An examination of the curriculum materials appears to indicate that this question is effective; if the objectives fail to indicate information regarding thinking; this question enables the evaluator to appraise the actual "thinking" activities used in the lesson plans. The phrase "lower or higher level thinking" is rather simplistic. This simplicity is intentional as it allows people with all levels of education or training to review the intent of the lesson components regarding thinking. According to educators Wendy Frood Auger and Sharon

Rich, the process of thinking has been described using terms such as "creative versus critical thinking, divergent versus convergent thinking and higher-level versus lower-level." Frood Auger and Rich explain that this terminology can create a dichotomy and in actuality these types of thinking function "in tandem" with one another. Lower level thinking is often thought of a straight memorization while higher level thinking refers to synthesis but often both are required in the process of thinking and learning.[160]

The final question in this portion of the "Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula" is as follows; d) Does the written curriculum encourage students to engage with material outside of the classroom environment? This straightforward question requires no adaptation. It is easy to follow regardless of the experience of the evaluator and provides information regarding the educational theory that undergirds the curriculum. For example, the idea of engaging with material outside the classroom is easily connected to the idea of "prior knowledge" and constructivist discourse. A thorough examination of the test curriculum confirms the value of this question.

Section Three: Social Sciences

Of all of the sections included in the "Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula," the series of questions regarding social sciences seems to require that the evaluator have more familiarity with education theory. However, the entire tool (including this section) was constructed to be implemented by teachers of all levels of experience. (Non-school related but church-based Christian Religious Education is a unique context because the vast majority of the teachers in the program are

[160] Ibid., 326.

volunteers with extremely varied levels of experience with teaching.) Consequently, the evaluation tool employs basic language and teachers can select the level at which they engage with the tool. Those who have more experience can rely more heavily on previous knowledge regarding theory and the less experienced evaluator can take a more surface level approach.

Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula

III Social Sciences

How formative a role should social sciences play?
Which ones are influential?

a) Is there a major emphasis on students' developmental stages – cognitive, physical, emotional, and spiritual?
b) What theorists/theories are the authors using as a foundation for their material? Is this difficult to identify? Are these difficult to understand?
c) Do the writers use any education related materials to support their approach? [Is the approach based on evidence?]
d) How does the written material encompass research findings in children's spirituality? Are students given opportunity to develop and articulate their own understandings?

Examining the Curriculum

Question: Is there a major emphasis on developmental stages – cognitive, physical, emotional, and spiritual?

Historically the construction of Christian Religious Education curriculum and programs has relied heavily on developmental theory, particularly developmental psychology. Use of developmental theory in religious education is seen in the work of religious educator Ronald Goldman, who was a follower of Jean Piaget. In the 1960s,

Goldman influenced religious education discourse through his focus on the mental development of children as it "relates to their ability to grasp the meaning of religious narrative, particularly the text of the Bible."[161] Upon examination, it is evident that David C. Cook – Bible in Life curriculum was influenced by the developmental lead of Goldman and the work of developmentalists such as Piaget, Kohlberg, Erikson and Fowler.

The most obvious and immediate manifestation of developmental stages within the material is the division into age groups. This age-level design allows the teacher to engage in activities that are designed to meet the cognitive, physical, emotional and spiritual needs of the students. The material is divided into the following groups; Toddler (18-36 months), Preschool (3 years-Pre-K), Early Elementary (Kindergarten-1st grade), Elementary (2nd and 3rd grade), Upper Elementary (4th and 5th grade), Middle School (6th-8th), High School (9th-12th grade) and Adult.

Within the lessons, teachers are provided with information regarding the developmental characteristics of the students that they are teaching. These snippets describe the features of the age group and attempt to clarify the lesson theme in light of the attributes of students at that level. The following excerpt is from the Middle School material:

> As young adolescents move from the innocent, adult directed world of their parents, they enter a new experimental, peer oriented role, grasping for social balance. Four characteristics of their socialization process are searches for: 1) independence from adults; 2) peer approval; 3) sophistication and 4) correct social behavior. As teachers, you can help your students with this process by providing opportunities to grow in these four areas…

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[161] David Hay and Rebecca Nye, *The Spirit of the Child,* rev. ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006), 49.

In this case, the curriculum designers provide the teachers with information regarding the social development of students in the Middle School age group. Each age level of curriculum offers these brief explanations of the learner and these age-level information snippets are titled appropriately for the different levels; "When teaching the Bible to Middle Schoolers…"

In the Early Elementary School material most of the age-level information provided in the lessons also focuses on development.

> Young children can learn how they should treat others. People like you [the teacher] who are interested in their growth and development are their best teachers. They learn from your instructions of how they should act and your example of gentle and loving interactions with the class.

This information is helpful for both novice and experienced teachers because it allows teachers to become familiar with the general traits of the age group.

Question: What theorists/theories are the authors using as a foundation for their material? Is this difficult to identify?

All curriculum developers design educational material based on underlying theories and philosophies. In some cases, the supporting sources are identified and/or included with the curriculum packages. In the David C. Cook – Bible in Life lesson plans, interestingly there are no references provided so the sources used to underpin the curriculum cannot be determined easily. The teachers' manuals do not have a bibliography and there are no supplementary materials in the curriculum package that offer a theoretical perspective or a list of theorists.

In the teachers' manuals, for every level items are included that provide the evaluator with a broad sense of the theory that is assumed within the structure of the lesson plans. One item is small insert regarding learning styles;

> Online Is Where It's @
> All children are different, Bible in Life helps you teach to each student's strongest learning style – and you can do this successfully in one classroom. For a full color, online demonstration of how this works, log on to www.DavidCCook.com and click on Learning Styles Teacher Training. Easy as the click of your mouse!

Based on the availability of this online teacher resource, it can be concluded that educational theory regarding learning styles is a component used in the construction of the David C. Cook –Bible in Life curriculum. The David C. Cook website indicates that the learning styles training is based on the work of prominent Christian Educator Marlene D. LeFever. LeFever has published a number of books the most noteworthy of which is; *Creative Teaching Methods* and *Learning Styles*.[162] She is currently Vice President of Educational Development for Cook Communications Ministries, the publisher of David C. Cook – Bible in Life curriculum. LeFever's work on learning styles draws on the work of a number of education theorists and she adapted their educational philosophies to suit the Christian Education context. Marlene LeFever's version of educational theory for this context has had a significant impact on Sunday School curriculum development and resulting programs.

The theoretical background for the David C. Cook – Bible in Life curriculum including information regarding Marlene LeFever was not easy to access even on the David C. Cook website. The material by LeFever is marketed and available online, but it is not specifically identified as contributing to the theoretical background used in curriculum design.

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[162] Marlene D. LeFever. *Creative Teaching Methods* (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications Ministries, 1997) and *Learning Styles: Reaching Everyone God Gave You to Teach* (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications Ministries, 1995)

Question: Do the writers use any education related materials to support their approach?

The theoretical underpinnings of the David C. Cook – Bible in Life curriculum are not immediately obvious to the teachers. The approach and methodology used in the lesson plans can help an evaluator to determine the philosophy that guided the development of the material.

An examination of the curriculum at every age level reveals a variety of kinds of activities present in each lesson and the material coincides with the use of Marlene LeFever's theory of learning styles. In the Early Elementary level students can participate in activity centers based on their personal preferences. Lesson One called "Jesus knows all about us," provides four different options at activity time; 1) Tossing Game, 2) Invisible Ink Picture, 3) My Feelings Book and 4) Storytelling and Verse Practice. This lesson allows for physical, artistic, intrapersonal and verbal learning. The activity centers supply a hands-on approach that strengthens the students' learning regardless of their strengths and weaknesses.

The Bible in Life Curriculum package comes with supplementary material that also supports both learning styles and multiple intelligences theory. For example, the age level packages include items like music, visual aides, take home materials and web-based support material. These teaching aids are clearly included to complement the array of activities in the lesson plans and engage the diverse classroom of learners.

Question: How does the written material encompass research findings in children's spirituality? Are students given opportunities to develop and articulate their own understandings?

Recent research in the area of children's spirituality has moved many curriculum designers away from the theories espoused by developmentalists. Christian Religious

educators who subscribe to new philosophies around children's spirituality recognize that children's spiritual understanding isn't always nurtured by the structures that normally accompany traditional, developmental theory based programs. Many Christian Religious Education programs have been constructed to transmit Biblical knowledge or faith traditions of a particular group; while this is a significant component of the Christian Religious Education, it left little room for students to delve into spiritual ideas and express their own understandings. Open-ended questions that begin with "I wonder" allow students opportunities to explore and may facilitate the beginning of spiritual journeys in which students can wrestle with religious concepts in addition to simply memorizing "required" information. This approach is often indicative of the influence of new research in children's spirituality, which supplements the transmission of religious material and seeks to encourage spiritual experiences.

In the David C. Cook – Bible in Life Middle School curriculum, there is no reference to children's spirituality, spiritual growth or spiritual development. One lesson called "Trouble in Paradise" is representative of the general approach in the curriculum. The question structure within the lesson is information based and not open-ended. This structure can be seen in the following questions:

> What are some things that get you in trouble? *(Disobeying my parents, breaking curfew, leaving my room a mess, picking on my younger sibling, etc.)* What are the consequences when you do these things? *(Students may say things like they are grounded or have telephone or computer privileges revoked. Write the consequences next to the actions that cause them.)* What warning did God give Cain before he killed Abel? *(If you do what is right, you will be accepted. But if you do not do what is right, sin is waiting to take you in – you must master sin before it masters you [verse 7].)*

The overall goal of the David C. Cook – Bible in Life curriculum is life application. Curriculum designers have assembled the activities in each lesson so that

students learn Biblical content and leave the classroom with an understanding or ideas that can be used in daily living. Consequently, questions are designed to elicit information based responses. They are not open-ended or "I wonder…" questions. Although students are provided with many creative ways to engage with the materials, they are not given the chance to explore and draw their own conclusions. Teachers are provided with correct answers (listed above in italics) and this provision may cause the instructor to stifle responses that are not listed as "correct." Overall, the general approach to lessons at all age levels does not signify the influence of the latest research in children's spirituality.

Discussion of Tool

The examination of David C. Cook – Bible in Life curriculum has provided material for analysis of the evaluation tool. The first question regarding the role of social sciences is "Is there a major emphasis on developmental stages – cognitive, physical, emotional, and spiritual?" This question requires that an evaluator be familiar with developmental theories. Such familiarity may be difficult if the evaluator does not have a suitable background; however, the question is significant and offers important insights into the structure and intent of the curriculum.

The second question is "What theorists/theories are the authors using as a foundation for their material? Is this difficult to identify?" This question also requires that the curriculum evaluator using the tool has specific background knowledge. In this case, an education background would be most advantageous. Because this background might not be the case, this question may be adjusted to assist the user. It was obvious, in the David C. Cook material, that the curriculum designers did not find it necessary to identify

the underlying theories used to construct the lessons in the curriculum package; no references, bibliography or supplemental materials are provided. The David C. Cook website does suggest a number of books and resources to assist teachers. These resources provided information regarding the theory undergirding the curriculum. For example, the website offers Marlene LeFever's book *Learning Styles* indicating that the content of the book has influenced the writers. Consequently, a question regarding teacher resources may be a helpful addition in the effort to uncover the theories used by the curriculum designers; "Do the publishers recommend or endorse complementary books or products that may reveal adherence to particular theories?"

The question "Do the writers use any education related materials to support their approach?" is unclear. The phrase "education related materials" is too vague and does not communicate exactly what is required. This question builds on the previous question regarding theory and was intended to help analyze the activities that are included in the lessons. Do the activities and supplementary materials coincide with the educational theory used in designing the curriculum? This adaptation better captures the intention and is easier to comprehend.

The final question in this section of the evaluation tool is "How does the written material encompass research findings in children's spirituality? Are students given opportunity to develop and articulate their own understandings?" This question is straightforward and deals with the issue of spirituality in relation to developmental theory. The second part of the questions should discuss "opportunities" as opposed to "opportunity" to develop and articulate their own understandings.

Section Four: Curriculum and Teaching

The first three sections of the "Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula" focus on the background and underlying theory that supports curricula. This section entitled "Curriculum and Teaching" focuses on lessons, activities and teaching.

Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula

IV Curriculum and Teaching

What does the curriculum look like?
How is teaching understood?

a) What is the role of the teacher?
b) What is the role of the student in the learning process?
c) What approaches to teaching and learning are encouraged?

Examine the written material

a) Authority/Objectivity
i) Who was involved in developing the material?
ii) Is this difficult to determine?
iii) Are their background/qualifications identified?
iv) How did they influence the material?
v) How do they handle controversial issues?
vi) Are biases obvious?

b) Lesson plans
i) Are they arranged in a manner that is easy to follow?
ii) Do they offer teaching resources for the classroom?
iii) Are the materials suited to the audience – illustrations, vocabulary, and content?
iv) Are the materials relevant to the daily lives of the students?
v) Are there a variety of activities/methods that might appeal to diverse learning styles, multiple intelligences and personal preferences?
vi) Are opportunities for development and/or background information provided to support the teacher?

Examining the Curriculum

Question: What is the role of the teacher?

Overall it appears that David C. Cook – Bible in Life curriculum is teacher-centered. The promotional material for the program is logically aimed at the teacher and is marketed as "The Sunday School teacher's favorite curriculum." The package is designed and advertised as being "easy to teach." It is assembled with the needs of the teacher in mind. While this design is sensible in relation to a commercially available product, the teacher-centered nature of the material is also reflected in the structure of the lessons.

A teacher-centered approach "traditionally has been conceptualized as the transmission of facts to students who are seen as passive receptors."[163] In the David C. Cook-Bible in Life curriculum, teachers present all of the information to the students and students are then expected to engage with the material and apply it to their daily living. This pattern is evident at all age levels including the adult level. The four-step lesson plan structure is used and adults are given opportunities to connect the theme to their lives and then examine related scripture. Biblical passages are analyzed and the related questions are presented in a teacher-centered manner. For example, in a lesson called "Honest and Trustworthy (Genesis 31:1-3, 19-24,36, 38-44)," adults use scripture to examine the notion that "God-honoring relationships are built on honesty and trust." In the lesson plan, Step 1 – Life Connection allows the students to relate the theme to their own lives and asks open-ended personal questions thereby focusing on the students. However in

[163] Becky Smeardon, David Burkam and Valerie Lee. "Access to Constructivist and Didactic Teaching: Who gets it? Where is it practiced?" *Teachers College Record* 101, no.1, (Fall 1999), 7.

Step 2 – Bible Exploration, the teacher presents the material and asks questions about the Biblical passages:

> How had Jacob's circumstance taken a turn for the worse? *(Suggested Answer) Over time as Jacob's wealth increased at the expense of Laban, it put strain on the relationship. This is shown by Laban's sons grumbling. Perhaps they feared that if the situation involving Jacob was left unchecked, the entire family inheritance would be lost to him.*
> What might have caused Laban's attitude toward Jacob to sour? *(Suggested Answer) Most likely, repeated negative reports from Laban's sons concerning Jacob caused a sizeable cooling in Laban's attitude toward Jacob. He could sense that his father in law was not as friendly as he had been previously toward him.*

These questions are representative of the format used with biblical material throughout the curriculum package. Teachers lead the discussion and "convey facts and inculcate knowledge…they present the 'right' way to solve problems (or even the 'right' solutions)."[164] The presence of the "suggested answer" implies that there is one "correct" answer and may promote an atmosphere (depending upon the teacher) with very little room to discover or create unique individual responses. Lessons are prescribed and do not allow for exploration or interpretation of material presented.

Question: What is the role of the student in the learning process?

The role of the student in the learning process is understandably directly related to the role of the teacher. In a teacher-centered approach to learning, students' main tasks are to receive and record information; however, in a student-centered or constructivist approach, students learn by actively constructing knowledge and reconciling new information with previous knowledge."[165] It seems reasonable that, in the latter approach, there would be more opportunities to engage faith in personal action. In other words, the

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[164] Ibid., 8.
[165] Ibid., 8.

initial invitation to reconcile one's own life within the framework and insights of the curriculum would seem to encourage such continued faith-life-faith dialogues and considerations. Thus, it would seem that the curriculum would be engaged continuously within a more personal and social atmosphere – where discussions of the meanings of the content of what is being learned merges with the sense of what that learning means in personal experiences. It might be that a more teacher-centered approach would militate against such "faith in action" understandings.

The David C. Cook - Bible in Life curriculum is mostly teacher-focused and therefore cannot be considered to be student-centered. Students use prior knowledge and their own experiences are valued, but the teacher presents all of the information and requires or expects specific responses. The curriculum designers' interest in students is reflected in their use of a variety of activity choices in each lesson but does not extend to generating knowledge.

Question: What approaches to teaching and learning are encouraged?

This question explores the approaches to teaching and learning that are used in the lesson plans. However, this information is covered in a thorough manner in the previous two questions. By examining the role of the teacher and the role of the student in the lessons plans, the evaluator is essentially collecting information that encompasses the approach to teaching and to learning.

Question: Authority/Objectivity
i) Who was involved in developing the material? ii) Is this difficult to determine? iii) Are their background/qualifications identified? iv) How did they influence the material? v) How do they handle controversial issues? vi) Are biases obvious?

Obviously, the author or creator of any curriculum has a powerful influence on the material. He or she may intentionally or unintentionally bias the curriculum to be

consistent with personal assumptions. He or she builds curriculum in the light of experience, personal insights, goals and desires for learners, and all manner of influence, and mirrors, and unknown events, etc. It is impossible for creation to be less than personal, and the creator's touch is always present in the creation – either known or unknown. For these reasons, it may be helpful for the evaluator to be aware of the identity of the writer.

In David C. Cook- Bible in Life material the writers are listed at the beginning of the teachers' manuals. This list notes that there is a curriculum coordinator for the entire package, but that different writing teams have been employed to create curriculum materials for each age level. The names of writers are readily obtainable and easy to access. However, additional information about the authors is not available in the curriculum or on the David C. Cook website. Other than personal contact – if such can be found – or attempts at Googling specific authors' backgrounds, there appears to be no way to determine the background or qualifications of these individuals.

This suggestion is given further credence when one studies the David C. Cook website. On the website, there are invitations to aspiring writers (sub-contractors) and David C. Cook is actively looking for people to fill writing contracts. Although this advertisement is not a critique of the curriculum-building process; however, one can make that assumption that people who are sub-contracted to write David C. Cook curriculum materials must agree with the David C. Cook mission and statement of faith – a process perhaps more normative in Christian circles than outside Christian circles. Ergo, the curriculum provides the evaluator with a basic understanding of the theological perspective of the authors (to do their work they must ascribe to the values of the

publishing company), but nothing specific can be obtained about the individual people. Because detailed information about the writers is unattainable, it is impossible to surmise their influence on the material. Furthermore, and more specifically, it is impossible to determine how controversial issues are addresses or how biases are presented.

Question: Lesson plans
i) Are they arranged in a manner that is easy to follow? ii) Do they offer teaching resources for the classroom? iii) Are the materials suited to the audience – illustrations, vocabulary, and content? iv) Are the materials relevant to the daily lives of the students? v) Are there a variety of activities/methods that might appeal to diverse learning styles, multiple intelligences and personal preferences? vi) Are opportunities for development and/or background information provided to support the teacher?

Within the David C. Cook - Bible in Life Curriculum, all the lesson plans follow the "Four Step Lesson Plan (Natural Learning Cycle);" Step One - get interested in the subject, Step Two – learn the facts from the Bible, Step Three – Practice what we have learned and Step Four - Use what we have learned during the week. This approach is consistent across the age levels and makes the lesson plans straightforward and easy to follow regardless of teaching experience. The intention of each component of the lesson is clear.

Teaching resources are included for every age level of the David C. Cook materials. These resources include bright colorful posters, worksheets, craft ideas (if age appropriate), materials to take home, etc. The resources include a wide variety of items teachers can use to help supplement each lesson. The lesson plans list other supplies that may be helpful and strengthen the student connection with the lesson materials. The David C. Cook website suggests additional books and materials that a teacher could order as additional supplements.

The lesson plan materials are well-suited to the audience for which they were designed. The illustrations, vocabulary, and content are age appropriate. David C. Cook – Bible in Life curriculum designers rely on theory from social sciences such as developmental psychology. This reliance helps them assemble material suitable for each level. The material is presented in a manner that is appealing to each age group. The appealing nature of the curriculum is easily seen in the take home pages for each level. For example, an elementary level take home page for a lesson regarding creation is colorful and contains a brief comic that helps students remember how to look up verses in the Bible using a "Bible Verse Code." In these sheets, students are asked to fill in the blanks, read a brief account of the story of creation including colorful photos and finally to draw a picture of how they can care for creation. Based on an understanding of child development, all the activities appear to be appropriate for the age/grade.

The focus of David C. Cook – Bible in Life material is life application. All lesson plans are designed with life application in mind and are, therefore, specifically concerned with making relevant connections to the daily lives of the students. The four step lesson plan format includes the opening component in which students connect the theme of the lesson to their own experiences. The final step in the lesson plan is designed to help students utilize what they have learned outside of the classroom. In the high school level material, there is a lesson called "Too Much Stuff?" This lesson focuses on "putting people before possessions." In the first part of the lesson, students are asked to "participate in a discussion that will lead them to ponder how much they value their possessions." This discussion is relevant to the personal lives of the teens. Following the biblical portion of the lesson students are given further opportunities to connect the theme

to their own lives through "evaluating the labels on their clothes and sketching images of what teens might buy with $1000."

The David C. Cook Bible in Life curriculum contains a variety of activities/methods that might appeal to diverse learning styles, multiple intelligences and personal preferences. Each lesson contains a section in which students are allowed to select an activity that appeals to their own inclination. This section is present at every age level; at the elementary age, the varieties of options for learning are available in the form of activity centers. In a lesson with the theme, "God keeps track of how we treat others," students learn the biblical material and are then given "Bible Activity Choices." These choices consist of three possible activities; i) Activity book – children complete theme based worksheets that involve fill in the blank, simple reading, drawing etc., ii) Kindness cards – children make cards for friends, family or congregation members in order to show kindness, iii) Treating Others Well Skits – children act out ways to treat other people.

Christian Religious educators who use the David C. Cook – Bible in Life curriculum are provided with opportunities for development and/or background information to support them as they teach. Each age level package contains references to books and resources that can be purchased through the David C. Cook website. There is also a detailed explanation of the structure of the lesson plans, explanations of the characteristics of the students at the age level being taught, as well as devotional material for the teacher.

Discussion of Tool

The "Curriculum and Teaching" portion of the Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula centers on the nature of the curriculum documents and the approach to teaching they espouse. The questions afford a thorough and detailed look at curriculum material.

The first three questions focus on approach; "What is the role of the teacher?" "What is the role of the student in the learning process?" and "What approaches to teaching and learning are encouraged?" These straightforward questions allow the curriculum evaluator to examine the responsibility of both the teachers and students.

An examination of the David C. Cook – Bible in Life curriculum provides an effective way to test the curriculum evaluation tool. The question "What approaches to teaching and learning are encouraged?" is redundant and the content of the question is covered in the previous two questions. An adaptation to the tool may be helpful.

The remaining questions in this section allow the evaluator to look specifically at the curriculum documents; the writers and the lesson plans. These questions appear to be effective. Overall, this portion of the Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula allows the evaluator to scrutinize the material in an efficient manner and to make both theoretical and practical assessments of the lessons.

Section Five: Education as Political

The final portion of the Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula is referred to as Education as Political and it focuses on the overall intention of the material in regards to influence on society.

Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula

V Education as Political

Toward what view of society is one educating?

a) Is there a theological view of society that is encouraged through the curriculum?
b) Is this perspective consistent with the pedagogical approach used in the material or is it conflicting?
c) What does the material teach implicitly or explicitly regarding sensitivity to diversity in race, class, gender etc? Is the notion of inclusion part of the overall vision for Christian Religious Education?
   i) Is the information presented culturally sensitive? Consider language, color, content, stereotypes, contributions to society, name calling, use of the Bible?
   ii) Is it influence and/or power persuasion positive? Consider use of put downs, issues of identity and empowerment, understandings of wealth and poverty, racism, sexism, ageism, roles, justice, representation.

Examining the Curriculum

Question: Is there a theological view of society encouraged through the curriculum?

The David C. Cook – Bible in Life curriculum purports a specific theological view of society and students. The overall goal of the curriculum is clearly defined in the material; it is to help students learn Biblical concepts and information that they can use in their daily lives. The lessons are designed so that students incorporate Biblical teaching into individual/personal understanding and living. This "life application" goal is encapsulated into the curriculum slogan, "Deep truth. Bold faith. Changed Lives." The curriculum writers are striving to influence individuals to become Christians and ultimately to encourage them to be active as Christians in their daily living. This goal

makes sense in light of the mission statement of the publishing company Cook Communications Ministries; "To encourage the acceptance of Jesus Christ as personal Savior and to aid, promote, and contribute to the teaching and putting into practice His two great commands-the love of God and of each other-by creating and disseminating Christian communications materials and services to people throughout the world."

Question: Is this perspective consistent with the pedagogical approach used in the material or is it conflicting?

The structure of the David C. Cook – Bible in Life material is consistent with the overall aim of the curriculum. The objective of the material is to influence students to live "Christian lives" and the curriculum is pedagogically configured to accomplish this goal. The "Four Step Lesson Plan" seeks to allow students to connect to the biblical material in such a way that it makes sense in their daily lives both during the teaching time and after the classroom experience has ended. This composition is readily apparent in a high school lesson called "Real Relationships."

In the opening exercise, students make an initial connection to the theme, "God created all people for relationships," by sharing ways that teen have tried to find fulfillment in their lives. Their ideas are written on paper cut out hearts and then are used as conversation starters. This exercise allows students to think about the topic as it relates to their own experiences. In the second part of the lesson students use Bible study material to look at scripture passages that teach about relationships and in the final components students interact with the information that they have encountered and they apply it to their own lives. This approach is purposely tailored to encourage students to be

able to use the Biblical material that they encounter in their daily lives and ultimately meet the overall objective of the curriculum.

Question: What does the material teach implicitly or explicitly regarding sensitivity to diversity in race, class, gender etc? Is the notion of inclusion part of the overall vision for Christian Religious Education? i) Is the information presented culturally sensitive? Consider language, color, content, stereotypes, contributions to society, name calling, use of the Bible? ii) Is it influence and/or power persuasion positive? Consider use of put downs, issues of identity and empowerment, understandings of wealth and poverty, racism, sexism, ageism, roles, justice, representation.

The David C. Cook – Bible in Life curriculum does not directly address the issue of diversity in race, class and gender etc. There is no statement regarding this issue and no lessons cover this topic. The only direct reference to diversity is in relation to diversity in learners. Teaching manuals for all age levels have an excerpt directing teachers to use the David C. Cook website to access teacher training that addresses different learning styles. In this way, the material recognizes that all learners are unique and that lessons should be adapted to meet their various needs.

One of the ways David C. Cook attempts to meet the needs of different learners and church congregations is through publishing a number of different curricula. Instead of developing one curriculum that suits everyone, the publishers have selected to assemble material for different denominations and people groups. For example, "Echoes" is a curriculum designed for the African American church; "Accent" is a designed for congregations who use the King James Version of the Bible; and "Wesley" is geared specifically for churches in the Wesleyan denomination.

The notion of inclusion is not mentioned in the David C. Cook curriculum materials. If inclusion is an intention of the publisher, it is not identified in the publisher's

lesson plans. However, the David C. Cook website contains a statement regarding the publisher's approach to diversity;

- We seek to work with those who hold views that may not align with our personal and cultural views.
- We express an open-heartedness towards others, being inclusive and seeking to avoid all "Christian" exclusivity and divisiveness, not being legalistic or judgmental.
- We do not use David C. Cook as a platform to express personal points of view that are outside of David C. Cook's mission and ministry philosophy.
- We honor expressions of diversity and uniqueness, while striving together for unity.[166]

Clearly, the publishers are interested in creating a context that is inclusive; however, this context is not directly communicated to the users of the curriculum.

Upon examination of the David C. Cook – Bible in Life curriculum, overall the curriculum appears to be culturally sensitive. However, when considering "language, color, content, stereotypes, contributions to society, name calling and use of the Bible," (as stated in the Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula) a number of items raise concern. In an adult lesson regarding honest and trustworthy relationships, students are provided with optional activities that help them interact with the Biblical passages they have studied. One of the activities is called "Discussion Group,"

> Read 'Honest Abe' and respond to questions 11, 12 and 13 in the student book. 11. How did Lincoln show his honesty to black Americans? 12. Why is honesty a vital Christian trait? 13. How do people gain your trust?Abraham Lincoln is probably the most beloved president of the United States, but does he deserve honor among African Americans? How much did he really do to improve the well-being of Americans of African descent? There has been much debate over these questions. What is your opinion?

[166] www. David C. Cook.com

This appealing example may allow adults to make meaningful connections with the notion of honesty. On the other hand, use of politicians as examples does raise some concern. Is it wise to use political examples in Christian Religious Education curricula? Could this question cause some people to feel excluded and others to be judgmental? In an effort to be sensitive to multiple perspectives, should the writers reconsider use of political examples?

In the David C. Cook material, the writers are careful to include pictures of an assortment of children. The images include black and white children and appear to be intentionally posed to fulfill the "requirement" for politically correct, multicultural material. The photos appear to depict neat, tidy, middle class children who are dressed in "proper, acceptable" church attire. This middle-class focus causes an instructor to wonder how a child who does not fit this image is able to connect with the materials. At the very least, the predominance of middle class examples calls into question how the curriculum understands the concept of class.

Issues of race are also raised in one of the advertisements contained in the middle of each teacher's manual. The publishers are promoting a program that supplies Bibles to children in a number of different languages. The ad contains images of the Bibles and each one has a picture of Jesus on the cover. The image of Jesus is the same on each Bible regardless of language and that Jesus is "white." All the biblical characters shown in the curriculum are surprisingly "white" in appearance. Does this indicate a lack of sensitivity to other cultures? The "whiteness" of Jesus and other biblical characters does seem historically and socially ignorant.

David C. Cook curriculum is published in the United States and is also marketed to the Canadian church. Logically, the curriculum uses American references in the lesson plans. The materials are not adapted or changed when sold to and used in the Canadian context. Depending on the size of the Canadian market, it may be helpful to consider using examples that are more relevant to the Canadian consumer. Use of meaningful "Canadian" examples would be a more culturally sensitive approach to the Canadian perspective.

In education discourse and among teachers, literacy is an ever-important issue. In the province of New Brunswick, literacy levels are surprisingly low.[167] Consequently, the issue of literacy is constantly in the forefront and comes to mind in any curriculum evaluation. The David C. Cook - Bible in Life material seems to assume a high level of literacy. This assumption is particularly apparent at the adult level, where the lessons require a significant amount of reading before, during and after the class. The curriculum designers do not offer alternatives recognizing that some adults may find the reading requirements challenging and may prefer other ways of engaging with information.

The David C. Cook – Bible in Life curriculum focuses on life application. To help students utilize Biblical material in their own lives, writers have attempted to include activities, ideas and content that allows for meaningful connection to daily living. In an adult lesson, "No Obstacle too Great," students focus on the idea that "God can use any obstacle to accomplish His will." This topic is intended to be relevant to many adults, because most people have had to face difficulties in their own lives. To further elucidate

[167] According to the 2003 International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS) conducted by Statistics Canada, New Brunswick scored significantly below the Canadian national average in four domains related to literacy; prose literacy, document literacy, numeracy and problem-solving. (Statistics Canada Website) available from http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/051109/d051109a.htm; Internet; accessed 02 February 2008.

the notion of obstacles, the lesson plan uses pertinent real life examples; in this case drawing on the idea of an obstacle course, the writers use a variety of military related example. There is a story about Iraq and Sadaam Hussein, reference to military boot camp and an account of an American who was captured by the Japanese in World War II. While I am confident that many people can relate to these ideas and examples, for a number of reasons I am not sure that military references are helpful in Christian Religious Education material. Use of military references may cause alienation rather than inclusion.

In terms of influence and/or power persuasion, the David C. Cook – Bible in Life curriculum is mostly positive. The material does not appear to contain any directly offensive or negative material. Nevertheless, an evaluator must consider what is being taught by virtue of not being addressed. This is null curriculum; "The null or unstudied curriculum consists of those topics not included in the official curriculum."[168]

At all age levels of the Bible in Life material, stories about women are absent. There are no biblical lead characters that are female. All the women who appear in examples and stories play a supporting role but are not the heroes, the ones "following God" or the central character in the account. This lack of gender representation raises questions about the role, identity, representation and empowerment of women in relation to the program. Interestingly, the majority of teachers and volunteers in Christian Religious Education programs are women.

Discussion of Tool

After examining the David C. Cook – Bible in Life material using the "Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula," it is clear that the "Education as

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[168] Michael Apple, *Teaching and Women's Work: A Comparative Historical and Ideological Analysis*, (Curriculum Praxis Series Occasional Paper No. 25), 27; William Pinar, Patrick Slattery and Peter M. Taubman, eds. *Understanding Curriculum*. (New York: Peter Lang, 2004)

Political" portion of the tool is helpful. It requires minor adaptations as a result of the pilot test. The first two questions "Is there a theological view of society that is encouraged through the curriculum?" and "Is this perspective consistent with the pedagogical approach used in the material or is it conflicting?" are valuable because they allow the evaluator to look at the overall intent of the materials in relation to society. This helpful reminder of the ultimate goals for the program ensures that consistency exists between that goal and the way it is communicated and taught to the students. This internal uniformity is essential and has a direct impact on the recipients.

Any education program and curriculum directly or indirectly communicates ideas about diversity and inclusion, and David C. Cook – Bible in Life is no exception. The tentative evaluation tool examines this idea in the following series of questions;

> What does the material teach implicitly or explicitly regarding sensitivity to diversity in race, class, gender etc? Is the notion of inclusion part of the overall vision for Christian Religious Education? Is the information presented culturally sensitive? Consider language, color, content, stereotypes, contributions to society, name calling, use of the Bible? Is it influence and/or power persuasion positive? Consider use of put downs, issues of identity and empowerment, understandings of wealth and poverty, racism, sexism, ageism, roles, justice, representation.

These questions are crucial and cause an evaluator to consider both visible and invisible issues of inclusion. The questions go beyond a superficial inspection and allow an opportunity for serious consideration. These questions require minor adjustments. For example, the question "Is it influence and/or power persuasion positive?" might be reworded to clarify the intention. Do the lesson plans influence students in a positive manner? Are issues of power in relationships portrayed in a positive manner? Another change that might help the evaluator is including the word "images" in the list of issues to be examined. Although this falls under the concept of representation, it may be helpful to

include "images" so that evaluators look at the pictures used to promote and included in the material.

The examination of the David C. Cook – Bible in Life using the established evaluation tool has revealed the need for various adaptations to the tool. In this final portion of the evaluation, questions focus on culture and its influence on the curriculum. The interplay between culture and curriculum is an important feature used by curriculum designers to create relevance. However, the interconnection between culture and curriculum can be problematic as demonstrated in David C. Cook material. As previously discussed, the curriculum writers have included political examples within the lessons. Use of political content helps to establish a relevant context for the material in the lesson but it also raises concerns.

Over the past number of years, in the United States, Christianity (particularly conservative denominations) has been increasingly influenced by politics and American politics have been influenced by right wing religion. In reference to evangelical traditions; author Tom Sine writes "I believe many people have unwittingly confused their faith with American nationalism and a narrow political ideology."[169] The pervasive and unspoken climate of interrelationship between right wing politics and conservative religion justifies the need for an additional question in the evaluation tool; "What are the outside influences upon the curriculum?" "Are the materials influenced by political perspectives?"

After examining the David C. Cook – Bible in Life curriculum as representative of the typical commercially available Christian Religious Education curriculum, it is clear

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[169] Tom Sine, *Mustard Seed versus McWorld: Reinventing Life and Faith for the Future*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 132.

that the "Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula" is a helpful instrument for assessing material. A number of changes and adaptations have been suggested to make the tool more effective. These are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

Historically, Christian Religious Education has been a pedagogical endeavor as opposed to a theological one. This is seen most clearly in the roots of the Sunday school movement. In Britain in the 1780s, "Robert Raikes – the Eli Whitney or Thomas Edison of the Sunday school – had broad humanitarian interests in mind as he began to stir up support for educating the early victims of the industrial revolution." [170] Consequently, the first Sunday schools established used scripture to teach rudimentary literacy skills to impoverished children.

Shortly thereafter, the Sunday school movement began in North America. "The first American Sunday schools were started in the 1790s modeled on British experiments. They aimed at offering the illiterate, urban poor a basic education – reading and writing – with the Bible as textbook."[171] In spite of the clear pedagogical intention of the initial movement, over time the mandate of the Sunday school shifted to a theological function - evangelism. Sunday schools began to teach people for the purpose of conversion. By the 1870s, the rationale behind Sunday school had altered again; it "had changed from a mission strategy to a church nurturing strategy. The heathen were no longer its chief targets, but the children of the blessed."[172] This is the common theological understanding of Sunday school that perpetuates today; with a few notable exceptions purely pedagogical connections have long since disappeared.

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[170] Martin E. Marty, "The Sunday School: Battered Survivor, " *Christian Century* (June 4-11, 1980), 636.
[171] Tim Stafford, "This Little Light of Mine: Will Sunday School Survive the 'Me Generation?" *Christianity Today* (October 8, 1990), 30.
[172] Ibid., 30.

In the 1920s, a return to the original understanding of pedagogy embedded in a religious education context is seen in the work of Canadian Christian Religious educators, Rev. Jimmy Tompkins and Rev. Dr. Moses Coady. These cousins, whose work became known as "The Antigonish Movement," established educational opportunities for poverty afflicted farmers, fishers, miners and disadvantaged people living in Nova Scotia. Now known as the Coady International Institute, based at St. Francis Xavier University, the organization trains leaders from around the world. "The ultimate purpose of the Institute's work is to contribute to the creation of a more just and equitable world, both for this and for future generations, where all can enjoy the 'full and abundant life' envisioned by Dr. Moses Coady."[173]

Another significant example of pedagogical intention in the context of religious education is demonstrated in the liberating educational endeavors of Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. Freire established empowering literacy programs for oppressed people in Brazil, later in Chile and eventually for the World Council of Churches. The WCC served as a religious context from which Freire could spread his legacy of critical pedagogy.[174] Interestingly, Paulo Freire's pedagogical work has had a profound impact on theology. "One of the most important and controversial developments in contemporary theology is the Liberation Theology movement which began in the 1960s. This movement is associated with – some would say indebted to - Paulo Freire and other educators working in Latin America."[175] Harkening back to the roots of the Christian Religious Education as demonstrated in the origins of Sunday school, the work of Paulo Freire clearly

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[173] "History of the Coady International Institute;" available from http://www.coady.stfx.ca/history.cfm; Internet; accessed 14 October 2007.
[174] "Paulo Freire;" available from http://www3.nl.edu/academics/cas/ace/resources/paulofreire.cfm; Internet; accessed 14 October 2007.
[175] Pinar et al., Understanding Curriculum, 643.

demonstrates the significance of pedagogy conducted in the context of religious education.

In an attempt to walk in the footsteps of giants such as Freire and Coady, I have situated my exploration of pedagogy currently used in religious education. The establishment of an evaluation tool is in an attempt to get back to the roots of these literacy projects. My evaluation tool fits into this context – it places pedagogy in a religious context and it is a recovery of the original pedagogical integrity that is inherent in Christian Religious Education.

The dissertation has taken into consideration new developments in research as well as pre-existing commercially available evaluation tools. It has focused on the pedagogical aspects of curriculum as opposed to the theological components of the material. With this information compiled, a tentative tool for evaluation was established;

Tentative Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula

I. Goal of Education

**Why educate in faith?*
What constitutes an educated person?

e) What is the overall goal of the program? Does the written curriculum help you to achieve that goal?
f) Identify the theological and pedagogical goals of the material. Are they implied or explicitly stated?
g) Is the approach to learning consistent with these goals?

II Knowledge

What does it mean to know?
What is the relationship between knowing and doing?

a) What kinds of objectives are established for each lesson?
b) Do they foster critical thinking and engagement with material?
c) What is most encouraged: lower or higher level thinking?
h) Does the written curriculum encourage students to engage with material outside of the classroom environment?

III Social Sciences

How formative a role should social sciences play?
Which ones are influential?

a) Is there a major emphasis on developmental stages – cognitive, physical, emotional, and spiritual?
b) What theorists/theories are the authors' using as a foundation for their material? Is this difficult to identify?
c) Do the writers use any education related materials to support their approach?
d) How does the written material encompass research findings in children's spirituality? Are students given opportunity to develop and articulate their own understandings?

IV Curriculum and Teaching

What does the curriculum look like?
How is teaching understood?

a)What is the role of the teacher?
b)What is the role of the student in the learning process?
c) What approaches to teaching and learning are encouraged?

Examine the written material
d) Authority/Objectivity
i)Who was involved in developing the material?
ii) Is this difficult to determine?
iii)Are their background/qualifications identified?
iv) How did they influence the material?
v) How do they handle controversial issues?
vi) Are biases obvious?

e) Lesson plans
i) Are they arranged in a manner that is easy to follow?
ii) Do they offer teaching resources for the classroom?
iii) Are the materials suited to the audience – illustrations, vocabulary, and content?
iv) Are the materials relevant to the daily lives of the students?
v) Are there a variety of activities/methods that might appeal to diverse learning styles, multiple intelligences and personal preferences?

vi) Are opportunities for development and/or background information provided to support the teacher?

V Education as Political

Toward what view of society is one educating?

a) Is there a theological view of society that is encouraged through the curriculum?
b) Is this perspective consistent with the pedagogical approach used in the material or is it conflicting?
c) What does the material teach implicitly or explicitly regarding sensitivity to diversity in race, class, gender etc? Is the notion of inclusion part of the overall vision for Christian Religious Education?

i) Is the information presented culturally sensitive? Consider language, color, content, stereotypes, contributions to society, name calling, use of the Bible?
ii) Is it influence and/or power persuasion positive? Consider use of put downs, issues of identity and empowerment, understandings of wealth and poverty, racism, sexism, ageism, roles, justice, representation.

* italicized focusing questions taken directly from Mary C. Boys

After the tentative tool for evaluation was developed, it was tested using a commercial curriculum entitled David C. Cook – Bible in Life. Recognizing the importance of speaking within my own community, these materials were deemed appropriate since they are representative of Christian Religious Education curriculum that is used in my denomination - Canadian Baptists, specifically Atlantic Baptists. In the family of Atlantic Baptist Churches there are 550 churches and many of these churches use David C. Cook material in their Christian Religious Education programs.

The selection of David C. Cook curriculum as a basis for establishing an evaluation tool was also dependent on theological perspective of the material. In order to examine the pedagogical issues within Christian Religious Education, an artificial

distinction between pedagogy and theology was established. This heuristic separation is in actuality impossible and undesirable in Christian Religious Education but in this case the isolated division of pedagogical and theological aspects of Christian Religious Education was temporarily permitted to allow for more detailed discussion of often overlooked pedagogical issues within the curriculum. Use of the David C. Cook - Bible in Life material, which has a theological viewpoint that is similar to that of the Canadian Baptist denomination, facilitated the isolation of pedagogical concerns. The "understood" theology created common ground from which to begin conversation regarding pedagogy.

The process of developing the "Tool for Evaluating Religious Education Curricula" presented a vehicle through which to address the research sub-questions; 1) How is Christian Religious Education currently evaluated? 2) What is the goal of Christian Religious Education curricula? How does this goal shape evaluation (or does it)? 3) How do Christian Religious Education curricula stand up to evaluation? 4) How do current educational theories impact Christian Religious Education?

Research Sub Questions:

1. How is Christian Religious Education currently evaluated?

Within the field of Christian Religious Education, there is very little written in regards to curriculum evaluation. Existing evaluations tend to focus of theology and cost effectiveness for the consumer. While theology and cost components are significant aspects of curriculum decisions, neither one encompass the in-depth pedagogical approaches and issues that also form the foundation of a curriculum document. This tool contributes to the literature in the discipline by focusing on pedagogy and the tool offer a

thorough, detailed questionnaire that can be implemented by both professional and volunteers who make up the vast majority of teacher in Christian Religious Education.

2. What is the goal of Christian Religious Education curricula? How does this goal shape evaluation (or does it)?

As previously noted in the conclusion and throughout the dissertation, the goal of Christian Religious Education curricula has become more theological and less pedagogical in focus. This directly impacts the nature of evaluation within the discipline. Most existing evaluation documents consist of theological questions and very few questions that address pedagogical issues.

3. How do Christian Religious Education curricula stand up to evaluation?

This dissertation provides some insights into the ability of Christian Religious Education curricula to stand up to evaluation. In testing the selected sample of Christian Religious Education material, it is clear that the curriculum addresses theological issues. In regards to pedagogical issues, this material appears to make a genuine attempt to address learners. More attention to in-depth pedagogical questions might strengthen the material.

4. How do current educational theories impact Christian Religious Education?

This study of curriculum evaluation in the field of Christian Religious Education was an engaging learning journey. Critical investigation of relevant trends in educational research has reinforced my understanding of the cross-pollination which occurs between education and the sub-discipline of religious education specifically. The application of educational theory to religious education is crucial and "should" be included among the many possible components of an evaluation of Christian Religious Education curriculum. The inclusion of educational theories offers important ideas that must be considered in religious education pedagogical practices; for me the most significant is the potential

impact of multicultural education theories on the theory and practice of religious education.

In an increasingly global context, it seems that religious groups are generally taking two approaches to the world and our volatile times, they become more tolerant or they react to perceived threats and become more exclusive and militant in their perspective and practice. The return to fundamentalism has profoundly impacted the landscape of the three major monotheistic religions of the world Judaism, Islam and Christianity.[176] Thankfully there are many religious and political leaders who recognize the dangers of the extremism inherent in entrenchment with any religion and are calling religious individuals to critical self-examination. Although one may disagree with the politics of the late Benazir Bhutto, one can hardly overlook her call for moderate and contemporary Islam.[177] Within Christianity, we need to do the same thing. I believe that Christianity calls us to go to a place of acceptance, love and service. As Christian religious educators, the inclusion of recent developments in multicultural education within our pedagogical philosophy and practice may be a concrete way that we can begin to move toward embracing the Other. This examination of curriculum offers the educator a tangible way to examine power relationships, language and ultimately structures that oppress.

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[176] See David Zeidan, "Typical Elements of Fundamentalist Islamic and Christian Theocentric Worldviews," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 13, no.2 (April 2002), 207-228.
[177] See Time Magazine review of book "Benazir Bhutto: Reconciliation – Islam, Democracy and the West" by reviewer Aryn Baker www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1714147,00.html

Tool for Evaluation Christian Religious Education Curricula

Through this examination and the responses to the research sub questions a number of possible changes to the evaluation tool were revealed thus leading to a new version of the evaluation tool as a possible response to the overall research question; How should Christian Religious Education material be evaluated?

Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula

I. Goal of Education

**Why educate in faith?*
What constitutes an educated person?

a) What is the overall goal of the program? Does the written curriculum help you to achieve that goal?
b) Identify the theological and pedagogical goals of the material. Are they implied or explicitly stated?
c) Is the approach to learning consistent with these goals?
d) How does a student who has engaged in "life application" (of Biblical material) demonstrate this?

II Knowledge

What does it mean to know?
What is the relationship between knowing and doing?

a) Are specific objectives listed in each lesson? Are the objectives written so that teachers can determine whether or not students can meet the requirements of the objective?
b) Do they foster critical thinking and engagement with material?
c) What is most encouraged: lower or higher level thinking?
e) Does the written curriculum encourage students to engage with material outside of the classroom environment?

III Social Sciences

How formative a role should social sciences play?
Which ones are influential?

a) Is there a major emphasis on developmental stages – cognitive, physical, emotional, and spiritual?
b) What theorists/theories are the authors' using as a foundation for their material? Is this difficult to identify?
c) Do the publishers recommend or endorse complimentary books or products that may reveal adherence to particular theories?
d) Do the activities and supplementary materials coincide with the educational theory used in designing the curriculum?
e) How does the written material encompass research findings in children's spirituality? Are students given opportunities to develop and articulate their own understandings?

IV Curriculum and Teaching

What does the curriculum look like?
How is teaching understood?

a) What is the role of the teacher?
b) What is the role of the student in the learning process?

Examine the written material
d) Authority/Objectivity
i)Who was involved in developing the material? ii) Is this difficult to determine? iii)Examine their background/qualifications? iv) How did they influence the material? v) How do they handle controversial issues? vi) Are biases obvious?
e) Lesson plans
i) Are they arranged in a manner that is easy to follow? ii) Do they offer teaching resources for the classroom? iii) Are the materials suited to the audience – illustrations, vocabulary and content? iv) Is the material relevant to the daily lives of the students? v) Are there a variety of activities/methods that might appeal to diverse learning styles, multiple intelligences and personal preferences? vi) Are opportunities for development and/or background information provided to support the teacher?

V Education as Political

Toward what view of society is one educating?

a) Is there a theological view of society that is encouraged through the curriculum?
b) Is this perspective consistent with the pedagogical approach used in the material or is it conflicting?
c) What does the material teach implicitly or explicitly regarding sensitivity to diversity in race, class, gender etc? Is the notion of inclusion part of the overall vision for Christian Religious Education?
i) Is the information presented culturally sensitive? Consider language, color, content, stereotypes, contributions to society, name calling, use of the Bible?
ii) Do the lesson plans influence students in a positive manner? Are issues of

power in relationships portrayed in a positive manner? Consider use of put downs, issues of identity and empowerment, understandings of wealth and poverty, racism, sexism, ageism, roles, justice, images, representation.

iii) What are the outside influences upon the curriculum? Is the material influenced by political perspectives?

* italicized focusing questions taken directly from Mary C. Boys

This finalized tool for evaluating Christian Religious Education curricula creates a space where those whose curriculum task it is to take more serious looks at evaluation of curriculum and its importance within the discipline of Christian Religious Education can do so. That this curriculum evaluation task has not been taken up within the church suggests how uncritical we Christians have been about the nature of our work. We have not yet utilized the knowledge of broader educational theories and critiques in ways that have shaped our own work for the better. This lack of curriculum evaluation has, I believe, left us in some cases weaker and the curriculum products of our endeavor less than effective. My initial efforts to aid in curriculum evaluation may seem somewhat tedious and perhaps fastidious; however, they are an attempt to open up a wider and broader conversation within our area. I trust that this work will not only contribute to the literature, it will also create an opportunity for continued discussion of the issues of pedagogy, theology and evaluation.

Through the activity of building a tool for analyzing curriculum in Christian Religious Education, the importance of curriculum evaluation as a component of educational research has been underscored. Curriculum evaluation is essential in any educational environment. Personally, this impacts my approach to teaching in both a

religious context and in the professional context in which I am engaged. Many of the significant questions regarding pedagogical approach are transferable across disciplines and could easily be used in the undergraduate science education and social studies education courses that I have been teaching. Curriculum evaluation is easily overlooked as the responsibility of school boards or curriculum designers and is often not seen as a role for the classroom teacher. Through this dissertation, I have come to value the importance of individual teachers who work with the curriculum in context. The questions contained in the Tool for Evaluating Christian Religious Education Curricula help stakeholders to interact with curricular material in a critical manner.

In regards to the discipline of Christian Religious Education specifically, the evaluation activity of this dissertation has allowed me to reflect on the integrity of evaluation material as well as a representative sample of the curricula that is being used specifically in my denominational milieu. This process has caused me to become more reflective regarding pedagogical issues and approach. A large portion of my prior educational experience has been theological in nature leading to a tendency to focus on theological aspects of materials that are being taught. This research allowed me to examine pedagogy in more detail. In the future it would be interesting to conduct a more detailed analysis of the continuity between theological understandings and ideas and the pedagogical approach used to present curricular material.

I hope that the Christian Religious Education community will see the value in this work. Curriculum evaluation may be seen by some as tedious and boring. In general people (even those) engaged in all aspects of Christian Religious Education are often more interested in educational issues that appear to be more concrete, for example; how

many children are attending the Christian Religious Education program? What are we going to do in the classroom that will keep the attention of the students? In light of this reality, curriculum evaluation may be overlooked as superfluous and a task that should be left to curriculum designers exclusively. On the contrary, I believe that the nature of the materials that are used in a curriculum document directly impacts the outcomes of the program, including the tangible, concrete results.

An important aspect of the educational process is reflective practice. This allows an educator to scrutinize what has occurred and to consider areas/items or approaches that may require adjustments. Engaging in this practice, I have examined the exercise that is encompassed in this dissertation and uncovered a number of "I wonder" questions that might be considered in subsequent related research projects. I wonder if it might be fruitful to examine material that is used by other denominations. In order to offer a voice in my own environment and to limit the size of the project I focused my attention on materials specifically from my own context. While this allows for credibility, a wider look at a broader selection of curricula may offer a variety of alternate perspectives. It may also be valuable to use curricula that are designed for use in particular contexts.

An examination of my approach to the research in this dissertation has led me to consider a number of future potential additions that could enrich the results of the project. The tool could be distributed to professionals in the field for their consideration. As a follow up to this research, I would like to begin to examine use of curriculum in the classroom context so that I can continue to explore approaches to pedagogy in this challenging setting. The volunteer nature of most teaching teams in Christian Religious Education makes it a unique context and I would like to allow focus groups of volunteer

teachers to use and analyze the created tool. In addition, my personal interest in issues of race, class and gender in religious education curriculum should be explored.

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